HSWriting

A high school writing reference book

By Douglas Perkins

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A high school writing reference site.

Douglas Perkins

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HSWriting

How do you feel about your writing? Can you communicate effectively on paper or with a keyboard? Do you write with style and impact? Do you write slowly or quickly? These are all questions that writers ask themselves. As with any pursuit, practice is essential. When in doubt, write more. Along with that, read more. Learning fundamental writing conventions and techniques are also important.

This is a reference website with three main sections: academic writing (papers), fiction writing, and poetry. Information provided is generally consistent with U.S. high school and university guidelines. However, writing is a vast field, and each instructor and institution has their own set of preferences. When in doubt, ask your instructor for their expectations. Finally, make your own decisions and find your own voice.

- Papers – academic writing with a focus on multi-page essays
- Fiction – reading and writing short stories can be fun and rewarding
- Poetry – a section on understanding and writing poetry
- Tools – an APA style guide, academic integrity information, useful websites, and more
- Advice – assorted bits of writing advice

> A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight.
>
> Ursula K. Le Guin, A Few Words to a Young Writer (2001)

Open Educational Resources

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About

Douglas is an English teacher in Kanagawa, Japan. Since 2007, he has been teaching English at primary and secondary schools, including five public schools in Yurihonjo, Musashino Joshigakuin JHS & SHS, Musashino University JHS & SHS, and a private JHS & SHS in Kanagawa. If you have any questions or comments, please contact the author. See ESL Tokyo for more information about the book, including mirrors and ePub and PDF versions.

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Papers

Here are some common types of academic papers.

- Argumentative Essay
- Cause & Effect Essay
- Narrative Essay
- Problem-Solution Essay
- Process Essay

Rhetorical Styles

Nonfiction writing can be loosely classified into four rhetorical styles.

1. **Expository** – Explain a topic to the reader.
2. **Descriptive** – Recreate a person, place, event, or action.
3. **Persuasive** – Change the reader's mind.
4. **Narrative** – Tell a story.

As a writer, be aware of the goal. For example, if you're writing a narrative essay, you don't need to convince the reader to take action on the issue. If you're writing a descriptive essay, choose vivid vocabulary.

Sometimes, you might switch styles in the middle of the essay. For example, a long argumentative essay is likely to contain both background information (expository or descriptive writing) and an argument (persuasive writing).

Requirements

Academic writing typically needs:

- A clear thesis statement
- Body paragraphs with evidence when reasonable
- Transitions that are easy to follow
- A conclusion that ties everything together
- Appropriate referencing when source material is used
- Writing that follows grammar, punctuation, and spelling conventions

Read the assignment descriptions carefully, and ask the instructor when you're uncertain.

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- Rhetorical Styles. (2023). Excelsior Online Writing Lab, Excelsior University. Retrieved 2024. CC BY-SA 4.0. *Some of the above content was copy/pasted from here.*
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Argumentative Essay

Some say that all writing is an argument of some kind. Even if you're writing an informative essay, you still have the job of trying to convince your audience that the information is important. However, there are times you'll be asked to write an essay that is specifically an argumentative piece.

An **argumentative essay** is one that makes a clear assertion or argument about some topic or issue. When you're writing an argumentative essay, it's important to remember that an academic argument is different from a regular, emotional argument. In an academic argument, you have more constraints to consider, and the focus is more on evidence and logic, and less on raw emotion.

Argumentative essays are common in academic writing and show up in all disciplines. You may be asked to take a stand on a social issue in your introduction to writing course, but you could also be asked to take a stand on an issue related to health care in your nursing course, or perhaps make a case for solving a local environmental problem in your biology class. So, it's important to learn some basic elements of a good argumentative essay.

The Goal

When several people are arguing, casually or politically, often the goal is to win the argument. In academia, that's not always true. Instead, there are two more important objectives.

1. If it's a matter of fact, find out what's true, or probably true, and why.
2. If it's a matter of opinion, find out what positions we can reasonably support, and why.

Suppose that Alice and James write papers about the value of video games in education and share them. Alice walks in thinking video games are a waste of time, but James convincingly demonstrates that they have powerful educational value. Alice might feel embarrassed that her original position was weak, but nevertheless she'll be more knowledgeable on the issue, and that's the goal here. We're trying to learn things about ourselves and the world.

Argument Types

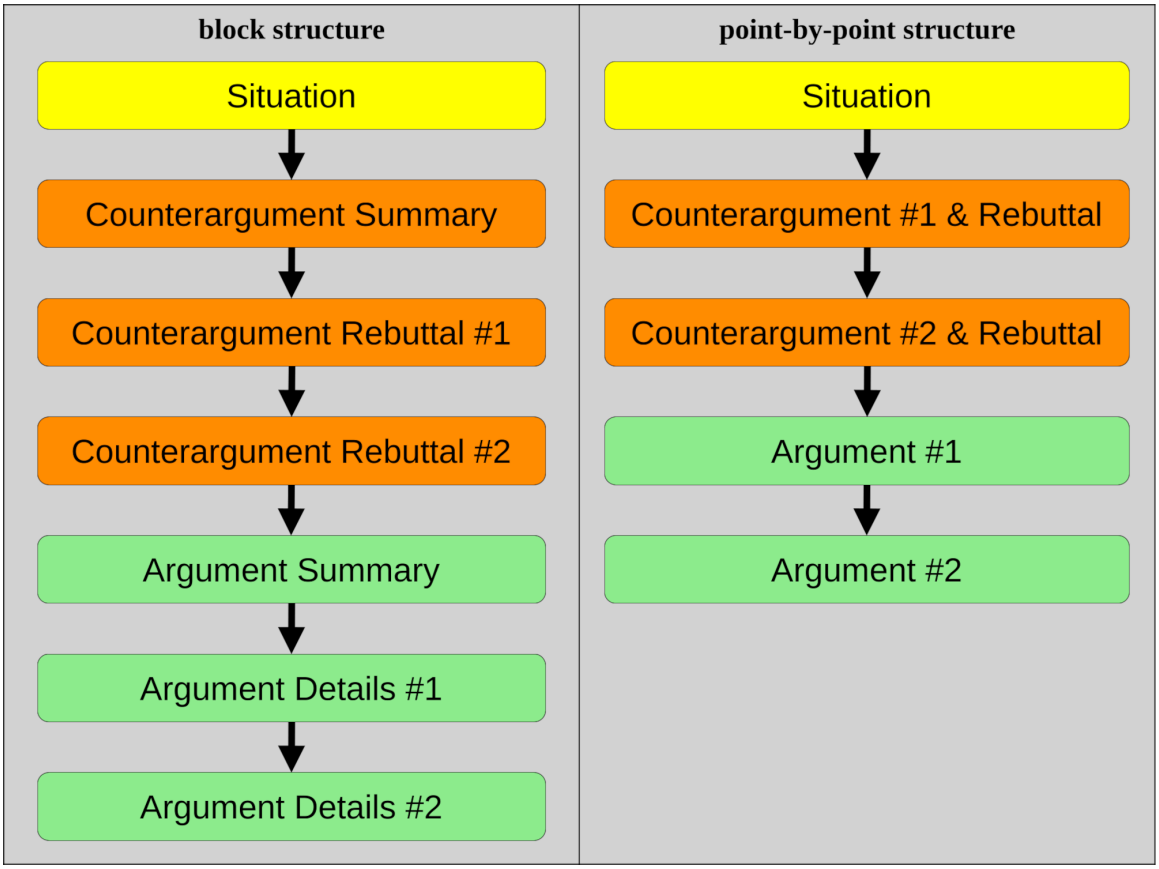
When your instructor asks you to write an argumentative essay, you'll often be given something specific to write about. However, there are times when you'll be given a choice of topics. You might even be asked to write an argumentative essay on any topic related to your field of study or a topic you feel that is important personally. Depending on the topic, you are likely to use one or more of the following argument types.

- **Proposal Arguments** – In this type of argument, you must propose a solution to a problem. First, you must establish a clear problem and then propose a specific solution to that problem. For example, you might argue for a proposal that would increase retention rates at your college.
- **Rebuttal Arguments** – In a rebuttal argument, you build your case around refuting an idea or ideas that have come before. In other words, your starting point is to challenge the ideas of the past.

- **Causal Arguments** – In this type of argument, you argue that something has caused something else. For example, you might explore the causes of the decline of large mammals in the world's ocean and make a case for your cause.
- **Definition Arguments** – In this type of argument, you use a definition as the starting point for making your case. For example, in a definition argument, you might argue that college basketball players should be defined as professional players and, therefore, should be paid.

Techniques

1. **Know your audience.** Consider your audience. In many courses, your actual audience is presumably the class and instructor, but you're writing as if other people could also be reading it. In other situations, the target audience could be different. Make reasonable assumptions about the reader's background knowledge. You can't explain everything, and if you explain things everyone knows, they will either get bored or feel insulted. Also, imagine what objections the audience might raise, and write about those. If you can't think of how a reader might react, share your outline with a few classmates and ask for their thoughts.
2. **Limit your appeal to emotion.** Relying too much on emotion could be seen as manipulative. The goal is that the reader believes your message because it's true or reasonable, and not because you toyed with their heart. That being said, there is a place for emotional appeal, particularly in the introduction or conclusion. Presumably you chose a topic that you feel is interesting or important; show the reader why they should care.
3. **Be fair and charitable.** Common topics for argumentative essays include topics such as school uniforms, single-sex vs. coed schooling, abortion, gun control, the death penalty, animal testing, whaling, gender, and other hot-button topics. If you choose a topic about which you're passionate, it's easy to get excited. There's nothing wrong with excitement, but be understanding and generous. Try to frame an opposing view as reasonably as you can, and then explain why you think it's incorrect or unconvincing.
4. **It's not a persuasive essay.** In a persuasive essay, the goal is to change the reader's belief. To make that happen, the writer might make heavy use of emotional appeals, they might ignore strong counterarguments, or they might rely on anecdotal evidence. Those strategies are typically permissible in persuasive essays but less so in argumentative essays. An argumentative essay should show what evidence and reasoning indicates, whereas a persuasive essay should change the reader's mind. Those two goals can overlap, but they're not the same thing.
5. **There are several common structures.** If your argument and the counterargument has one main complicated point, consider using a block structure. If the two arguments are composed of many smaller claims, consider using a point-by-point structure. Many writers prefer to address the counterargument before explaining their own argument because the resulting essay ends constructively and positively. Adapt these structures to fit the information and arguments that you have.



Vocabulary

If you want to state a person's position strongly, consider the following verbs: advocate, allege, argue, believe, claim, contend, deny, insist, maintain, reject.

If you're stating a position with less firmness, consider these verbs: favor, imply, indicate, question, recommend, suggest, support.

Here are some useful expressions for introducing and addressing contrary positions.

- Although it has been suggested that MSG is unhealthy, recent research indicates otherwise.
- Some people believe that MSG is unhealthy. However, recent studies demonstrate the opposite.
- Opponents of MSG consumption claim that it is unhealthy, but recent findings show no nutritional drawbacks.
- It has been stated that MSG is harmful. Yet, evidence indicates that it is safe.

Example Essays

1. Cheap Thrills: The Price of Fast Fashion
2. How Japan Tortures Citizens With Its Outdated Drug Policies
3. Are Animals Really Happy?
4. Eco-friendly Cars?
5. The Day AI Lost

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Argumentative Essay 1

Cheap Thrills: The Price of Fast Fashion

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April 1, 2014

The cost of clothing is a concern for most American families. In an article for Newsweek's parenting column, Springen (2008) offered this advice to parents tackling back-to-school shopping: "Steer your kids towards affordable stores like Old Navy and H&M, but don't force them to buy knockoffs. These days, even preschoolers can spot a pair of fake Ugg boots … and may taunt classmates about them" (para. 1). This advice appears sound and sincere. However, such common wisdom hides the uncomfortable reality that most westerners are more concerned with getting a bargain than with the darker side of mass-consumer fashion.

Attachment to cheap, disposable clothing, commonly known as fast fashion, is supporting a corrupt labor system, unsustainable production practices, and a culture of mindless consumerism. While the issue is complex, western consumers can contribute to a culture of change by revisiting some of their preconceived notions about frugality.

With frequent stories in the news about factory accidents, the average consumer is at least somewhat aware of the conditions most clothes are made under. According to Dishman (2013) of Forbes, "Fashionistas often have a love/hate relationship with [mass-market] retailers like H&M because they equate the inexpensive price tag to the company's ability to manufacture its merchandise in sweatshops filled with underpaid workers" (para. 8). Yet, this ambivalence does not translate into action because shoppers are used to getting what they want fast and cheap. In his essay "The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer," author and industry expert Nathaniel Beard (2008) described the "polarization" between the growing sense of moral obligation in fashion and the consumer who is "increasingly used to, and comfortable with, the availability of trend-led fashionable clothing that is extremely cheap, and where there is actually relatively little guilt felt about its disposability" (p. 450). The instant gratification of an inexpensive garment, such as a pair of sale pants from the Gap for three dollars, wins over humanitarian responsibility because it is convenient, fun, and more easily reconciled with the individual's bottom line. Plus, everybody is doing it. A middle-class mother or college freshman might reasonably argue they cannot afford to spend more because of financial restrictions. Yet, a westerner's definition of deprivation often looks pretty rosy in comparison to the average living and working conditions in the underdeveloped world. Perhaps, buying fewer items is a better financial solution than repeatedly buying cheap thrills.

Similarly, consumers are willing to turn a blind eye to the health and environmental implications of their shopping habits in favor of steep discounts. According to Gershon (2005), "a third of a pound of pesticides, which contain known and suspected carcinogens, are used to make a simple cotton t-shirt" (p. 56). He also noted that large amounts of chemical pesticides and fertilizers are used on both cotton and wool, which is harmful to life, both human and animal, and contributes to pollution (p. 56). Once again, this information is available to shoppers but often avoided because it contradicts the accepted mentality of consumption. Beard (2008) acknowledged fashion companies do try to mislead consumers with their use of catch phrases such as "ethical" and "fair trade" (p. 450), but he also emphasized that these same individuals rarely ask hard questions about their clothing (p. 448). Accepting a company's marketing as truthful and

focusing instead on individual savings is simply easier than purchasing less or doing research. The gratification of a cheap thrill is immediate, whereas the detriment to a wearer's health and the environment they live in may not noticeably surface for many years.

Health complications and chemical hazards during production and consumption are not the only environmental risks associated with fast fashion. The negative consequences of this cultural habit continue when a consumer disposes of a one-season garment in a charity shop or landfill. According to H&M global head of sustainability Helena Helmersson, "People in some countries cannot even afford H&M's brand of cheap chic and that just reinforces the company's 'huge responsibility' to ditch the throwaway attitude in favor of sustainability" (as cited in Dishman, 2013, para. 9). Helmersson described the attitude of the masses in terms of having room for improvement, but the truth remains that her company, and the hundreds of others like it, propagate this phenomenon with their cheap fabrics, construction, and manufacturing. The people who frequently purchase this type of garment will wear it for a small number of seasons before discarding it in favor of a new, but similar, garment. Thus, the cycle of more-is-more consumerism is upheld.

Brands like H&M often maintain they can produce eco-fashion on the cheap, but this is the type of misleading marketing to which Beard (2008) referred in his article. For example, H&M recently released a collection of organic and recycled clothes that follows several similar efforts in recent years (Dishman, 2013). Yet, these types of efforts rarely address all of the relevant issues, both environmental and humanitarian. For example, H&M's 2010 Spring Garden collection contained cotton produced with GMOs, which contradicts the marketing strategies they used to promote the collection (Dishman, 2013, para. 3). Additionally, these collections over-simplify the complexities of the interplay between all of the issues involved in the industry.

According to Beard (2008), the chain of a garment's production includes multiple stages of manufacturing, transportation, retail, and disposal, which makes accountability a real challenge (p. 448). Companies can easily obscure ugly truths while promoting positive elements. A garment at H&M may (or may not) be made from organic cotton. But that organic cotton is likely to have been picked and processed by sweatshop labor, and pollution probably occurred during transport. These types of campaigns are quick fixes designed to ease a consumer's qualms about what they are buying, while disregarding the malevolent nature of the supply chain.

In "Wearing Your Values," Gershon (2005) recognized that the price of quality garments is currently quite high, but he also argued that the prices will decrease if companies recognize the potential market for ethical clothing and streamline new practices (p. 57). Consumers can contribute to this change by showing companies they are willing to make reasonable financial investments in doing the ethical thing. A culture that is too invested in possessing large quantities of cheap, disposable garments contributes to a system that exploits natural resources and human rights. Frugality should not come at such a high cost.

Word count: 1,070

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Argumentative Essay 2

How Japan Tortures Citizens With Its Outdated Drug Policies

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2023-09-17

“Don’t do drugs, kids!” is a sentence hammered into each and every kid with competent parents for very good reason. Drugs are infamously dangerous and have been a topic rigorously surveyed by every developed country since the beginning of their criminalization. Drugs are a very prominent problem around the globe and are dealt with differently in every place. Japan deals with drugs in a very systematic and strict way when in reality, drug addiction is something that should be dealt with in a more delicate manner. In Japan, drug users are shunned by society, making it very hard to be rehabilitated after struggling with drugs, therefore making it difficult to become a functioning member of society. Instead of harshly punishing these addicts, Japan should have a more decriminalizing stance on drugs instead of one that is not much more than a foundation for stigma and suffering.

The core of the problem lies in how the Japanese government treats drug abuse as a criminal issue rather than a health and societal one. A heavily critical article on Japanese drug policies by the East Asia Forum condemns Japan as being very far behind in drug policies compared to other first-world countries. The article states that Japan is the only nation in the G7 that has yet to realize that “Punitive approaches to drug use turn a public health issue into an intractable police matter without addressing the underlying concerns” (Christensen, 2023). The mentioned underlying concerns here can range from a wide variety of issues, from public health concerns like the spread of diseases to even economic burdens like high costs of incarceration and empowerment of the black market.

An obvious concern is that decriminalizing drugs would lead to an increase in consumption. With no harsh penalties, people would be more open to experiment with drugs. However, evidence from countries that have decriminalized drug possession suggests otherwise. A fact sheet made by the Drug Policy Alliance (2015) states how in Portugal, drug decriminalization in 2001 led to not a rise, but a decline in young drug users. The key is to pair decriminalization with comprehensive public education and treatment programs that emphasize the risks and consequences of drug use. Japan could adopt a similar model, focusing on prevention through education and harm reduction strategies. When decriminalization is paired with access to healthcare and support services, it encourages responsible behavior and empowers individuals to make informed decisions.

Another underlying concern of the Japanese government are the cultural values of Japan. Japan has a strong cultural emphasis on discipline, social harmony, and personal responsibility. Critics would argue that drug decriminalization goes against these values and that society would not tolerate behavior that could harm individuals and disrupt social order. While it is important to respect cultural values, it is also vital to recognize that addressing drug use through punishment often leads to more harm, both for individuals and society. The compassionate approach of decriminalization aligns with traditional Japanese values of care and community support. By focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration, Japan would be promoting responsibility and social harmony. This approach provides people with the resources they need to overcome addiction and

return to being productive members of society, which ultimately strengthens society rather than weakening it.

People who are undereducated on the topic of drugs can easily argue that drugs are inherently harmful to humans, therefore they shouldn't be decriminalized. While it is true that drugs can be extremely harmful when used wrongly, this is a blanket statement that clearly oversimplifies a complex topic. Many substances that fall under the wide category of "drugs" have many recognized medical benefits. Substances like cannabis and other psychedelics have shown promising results in treating conditions such as chronic pain, PTSD, depression, and anxiety, as stated in the national library of medicine of the USA (Morgan et al., 2013). Not giving citizens access to medication that could improve someone's quality of life can be even considered a violation of human rights. In a country as developed as Japan, it is simply appalling to restrict citizens of potentially life-saving medication.

In conclusion, Japan remains heavily uneducated about the complexities of drug use, with current policies rooted in outdated perspectives that focus on punishment rather than public health. The evidence from other countries shows that decriminalization, coupled with education and harm reduction, can effectively reduce the harms associated with drug use. It is time for Japan to renew its drug policies, moving away from criminalization and toward a more compassionate, science and evidence-based approach that prioritizes health, safety, and societal well-being.

Word count: 775

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Argumentative Essay 3

Are Animals Really Happy?

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September 19th, 2024

Imagine a life put in a tiny cage, deprived of freedom, just given food constantly, living as a textbook for human education. This is the reality for countless animals living in zoos across the world. While advocates claim that zoos play a vital role in conserving endangered species and embracing education, the ethical consequences of keeping wild animals captive exceed these possible advantages.

Zoos educate people. “When educating people about the importance of conservation of species and their habitats in zoos, it is important to create a connection between them and nature,” Mcelroy (n.d.) says. Zoos, where visitors can observe the actual living animals up close and see them with their own eyes, bring an unforgettable experience and an understanding of animal conservation. With the need to conserve endangered species, the public must learn about conservation, and the interaction between animals and humans could potentially protect wildlife. However, putting animals in small enclosures, only to deepen people’s understanding of wildlife, is unethical. In the wild, animals are designed to inhabit large areas, hunt, and interact with others. But what about the conditions that zoos provide to animals? None of them are enough for animals to live as they used to live in the wild. Keeping animals in cramped spaces with restrictions to access the natural habitat they require to survive, is the same as diminishing animal basic rights. In this biodiversity world, people must respect animals, just as we value our human rights, and not treat animals as if they are our possessions.

Providing places for connection between humans and animals is not the only way for humans to make conservation develop. Many activities are done to provide a better understanding for humans about animals and their lives. For instance, at one of the famous zoos in Japan, the Ueno Zoo, there are programmes where students can directly interact with animals by taking care of them. These educational assistance programs are often held at Japanese primary schools as school events, and students can learn about animals as well as their habitats, entertainingly and memorably. In fact, it would encourage people to embrace pro-conservation and reverence for the natural world attitudes. However, interactions between humans and animals may also heighten the urge for certain people to possess wild animals as “pets” and could give the impression that abusing animals for “cheap titillation” is acceptable. In fact, according to the National Library of Medicine, a recent research paper of the literature on the relationships between animals and visitors in zoos across several nations and continents has taken this into account (Learmonth, 2020). This means that the physical activities held in zoos might be effective for students, but simultaneously, they should not be fully promoted, as the drawbacks are serious.

Additionally, these activities are not completely conservation-focused, indeed, they have commercial goals. Exotic animal exhibitions are the main draw for most of the zoos, and they take precedence over really aiding in conservation efforts. Though some zoos do take part in endangered species breeding projects, the majority of animals kept in captivity are not included in these programs. Zoo animals that are not threatened with extinction and no need to be conserved, are used as financial targets for zoos’ economic gain.

“But to be honest, how do we even know what animals feel?” Whenever people say that animals feel unhappy in the enclosed space at zoos, some oppose by saying this. It is obvious that animals and humans speak differently, and there is no way we can communicate with each other perfectly. However, behaviors such as pacing, self-harm, or lethargy, often referred to as “zoochosis” are commonly seen in zoo animals. Animals with these signs show that they have stress and frustration brought on by captivity (What Is Zoochosis and How Do Animals Get It?, n.d.). Because of their large size, social behavior, and such, elephants especially feel uncomfortability. They are confined alone and experience intense loneliness, and every zoo elephant suffers psychologically from being caged up in tiny yards whereas their free-ranging counterparts wander up to 50 miles a day, and many get arthritis and other joint issues from standing on hard surfaces. According to Marris, “At least 20 zoos in the United States have already ended their elephant exhibits in part because of ethical concerns about keeping the species captive” (Engle, 2021).

In conclusion, zoos cannot excuse the cruel treatment of animals kept in captivity, even though they might provide certain educational advantages. The mistreatment and psychological trauma that zoo animals endure highlight the necessity of reconsidering human interactions with the natural world. Instead of depending on old and harmful techniques, conservation efforts should concentrate on protecting the natural ecosystem and species in the wild.

Word count: 796

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Argumentative Essay 4

Eco-friendly Cars?

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October 5th, 2024

In the past few decades, electric cars have gained popularity due to their quiet operation, ease of driving, and most importantly, their "eco-friendliness." As global warming accelerates each year, many people view electric cars as a solution to reduce carbon emissions and slow down global warming. However, numerous studies suggested that electric cars are not good for the environment and they do not represent a comprehensive answer for global warming.

One common argument made by people who favor electric cars is that electric cars are good for the environment because they do not emit carbon dioxide. For example, Toyota Marin, a Toyota dealership company, claimed that electric cars "lower carbon footprint and positively impact the environment" (*5 Reasons Why Electric Cars Are Better Than Gas Cars*, n.d.). This statement itself is true. However, it overlooks an important fact: a large amount of carbon dioxide is emitted during the process of producing electricity, which is the power source for electric cars. In Japan, about 72% of the energy is produced from thermal power generation, and globally, about 60% of the energy is produced from thermal power generation. Thermal power generation is widely known for its extreme emission of carbon dioxide and is considered as one of the main contributors to global warming. Though electric cars themselves do not emit carbon dioxide, since their power source relies on electricity, which accelerates global warming, they indirectly contribute to global warming.

Another statement from the people who consider electric cars to be eco-friendly is that electric cars require fewer natural resources compared to gasoline cars. Still, we must not ignore the fact that electric batteries, the essential part of an electric car, require rare metals such as lithium-ion, cobalt, nickel, manganese, silicon, and electrolyte, which have the potential of causing disastrous environmental issues when mining and processing. According to Harvard International Review (2021), for mining one ton of rare metal, thirteen kilograms of dust, ten thousand cubic meters of waste gas, seventy-five cubic meters of wastewater, and one ton of radioactive waste are produced. These wastes can cause water pollution, radioactive waste, and the disruption of the ecosystem. In the interview by Nikkei, Toru Okabe, a professor and the director of the University of Tokyo's Institute of Industrial Science, argues, "EV batteries and motors contain large quantities of rare metals… [and] the process of mining the ores from underground and extracting useful metal produces vast amounts of harmful material. You generate hundreds of times as much waste just to make one vehicle" (Matsumoto, 2024). From these statements, it is clear that the production of electric cars carries the risk of enormous harm to the environment.

Moreover, the manufacturing process of electric cars, from production to disposal, is extremely harmful to the environment and causes many negative effects. Car production requires resources such as rubber, glass, plastic, steel, and paints, all of which harm the environment during production and processing. Once the cars are made, they again contribute to carbon dioxide emissions since they will be shipped to many countries around the world. Even after the life of the car ends, it remains harmful to the environment since cars are hard to dispose of, and many of them end up in landfills, emitting toxic chemicals and contaminating the ground.

Electric cars are not as good for the environment as people consider them to be; actually, they are the polar opposite of eco-friendliness. Traditional gasoline-powered cars cause huge damage to the environment as well. Regardless of type or power source, the car itself is extremely toxic and destructive, and it is crucial to accept this reality and reconsider our current lives based on motorization. In the United States, there were 290 million cars in 2020, among a population of 330 million, meaning there is nearly one car per person. The population of the world is 8 billion, and if countries worldwide achieved similar levels of motorization as the United States, there would be around 7.2 billion cars on the planet.

It is important to take a broader perspective and question the necessity of cars in our daily lives. If motorization progresses and society becomes dependent on cars globally, it is evident that our environment will not be able to accommodate such numbers of cars, whether they are electric or gasoline-powered. The environment will surely be destroyed by the intense demand for energy sources such as fuels and electricity and polluted by chemicals. It is necessary to rethink the current car-dependent society and shift towards creating communities that rely less on cars.

Many people buy electric cars thinking that they are good for the environment and a viable solution for reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Even though electric cars can overcome one of the shortcomings—the emission of carbon dioxide during operations—they cause other problems, such as increasing the demand for electricity and potential harm to the environment by mining rare metals, and will never be the fundamental solution for the environment. Instead of being swayed by marketing trends, buzzwords, and advertisements of car industries, it is necessary to have a more sustainable lifestyle and reconsider the dependence on motorized vehicles.

Word count: 868

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Argumentative Essay 5

The Day AI Lost

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October 10, 2024

In this technology-driven world, the field of translation is shifting from humans to devices every day. Businessmen and students are often caught in sight with applications such as Google Translate, DeepL, or ChatGPT displayed on the screen of their devices while facing a foreigner or solving homework from a second language class. The convenience of these online tools today is bringing up the question of whether education in second languages is worthwhile anymore. However, it is certain that some key aspects of human life and society, such as nuance, connection, and development, will be difficult to replace with the power of AI.

While some people point out the advantages of using AI as a learning platform, other people point to the downsides of learning foreign languages. Here, the main argument is whether learning a new language is worth the time and effort when AI is there to translate everything with only the effort to press the enter key (Baluta, 2024). Especially for those who speak English, learning another language does not become a priority when nearly 1.5 billion people speak their language (Dyvik, 2024). To put their claim together, why bother attempting to learn a new tongue and not ask AI when they provide people with a fast and satisfactory way to express themselves in other languages?

Although remarkable speed and ease is an advantage of AI learning, the fact that the information provided might not be true always trails around. As “Artificial intelligence is only as knowledgeable as the information it has been trained on” (*5 Pros and Cons of AI in the Education Sector*, n.d.), if the trained information was biased, the students could possibly receive lessons based on those distorted knowledge. Particularly, since the topic is about a language that the users knows nothing about, it could be harder than other topics for them to notice whether the information they gained is reliable or not. As learning true information is the minimum requirement and top priority in education, AI which does not meet this could be said as inadequate.

As the argument between the pros and cons of AI utilization and second language acquisition goes on, there are concrete reasons why AI can never beat human teaching. One of the main and obvious points are subtleties (*Will AI Replace The Need For Learning Languages?*, 2023). Although it is not so hard for humans to pick up minor nuances in the tone of others, AI is not so fond of this skill. Expressions such as irony and sarcasm could be taken more seriously than needed, and friendly and business tones could become mixed up at times. This not only fits for written language but in speaking as well. To gather, nuance and tones are indispensable in human communication, and as long as AI cannot cover this area, it is impossible to say that human teaching is no longer needed.

Another obstacle that AI cannot overcome is the cultural respect that comes with learning a foreign language. After all, language is not all about grammar and vocabulary. Rather, the cultural background of its development and the humanity of the people who use them count bigger. Replacing a shared language learning experience with AI learning would be equal to taking away the opportunity to foster mutual respect and social bond between the ones people communicate with, and if the language is a minor tongue, it might even eliminate the chance to “preserving cultural heritage against extinction” (*Will AI Replace The Need For Learning Languages?*, 2023). Therefore, to protect the human

nature of accepting one's culture and to keep alive fading languages, it is important that people continue to learn new languages.

It is often said that learning languages has a positive impact on one's cognitive skills. The process of learning has several effects on the human brain, and the task of remembering new vocabulary and grammar rules especially enhances one's memorization abilities. Numerous studies conducted until today have shown that bilingual people do better on work involving memory than monolingual people, and that their ability even leads to better multitasking and decision-making skills (Endeavour Speech LLP, 2024). Not only does the impact reflect on the present life, but it may also have a positive effect on the later life of humans. The decline in risk of diseases such as dementia and Alzheimer's is pointed out between those who learn a new language, and it is an effect that people who rely only on AI can never experience.

To conclude, the benefits of learning foreign languages outweigh the disadvantages of it or the merits of using AI due to elements such as tone, connection, and cognitive development. The ongoing development of AI shows that using them as an assistance tool is not completely deniable. However, as the ability to absorb new languages and to communicate with the world is a capability that only humans have, it will be a waste to give away all of its potential and to be wholly devoted to the power of AI. It is crucial that humans protect their natural-born talent.

Word count: 859

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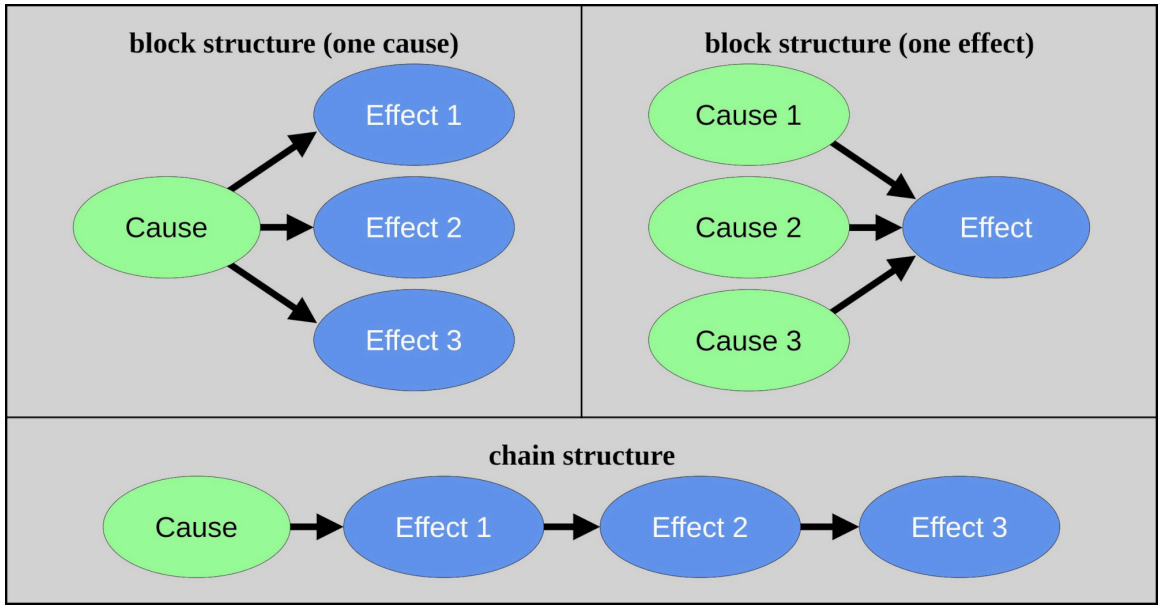
Cause & Effect Essay

Cause and effect is a rhetorical style that focuses on the connection between causes and effects. This kind of essay is commonly encountered in both writing classes and other disciplines. For example, you may be asked to write about the causes for the decline of a particular company in your business class, or you may be asked to write about the causes of the rise in obesity rates in the United States for your nursing class. A cause and effect essay should clearly identify why something happens or what happens as a result or something.

Techniques

1. **Research the events thoroughly.** It is easy to find one obvious cause or effect, and careful research will help you discover any others that are worth communicating.
2. **Explain the causes and effects in order.** List the causes in chronological order. Organizing by time makes it easy for the reader to understand.
3. **Explain how certain you are.** If you find evidence showing that one connection is very strong, write that. If there's a slight or possible connection, write that. If you're predicting a future effect where an effect is likely but not certain, write that. In any case, use evidence or logical reasoning to support your claims.
4. **Avoid post hoc reasoning.** Post hoc reasoning is when one action happens before another, and you conclude that the first action caused the second action. A good example of this is superstitions. For example, if you wear a new sweater the day you ace an exam, you might believe that it's your lucky sweater.
5. **Use paragraphs to make things clear.** There are no strict rules about the number of paragraphs. Often, a writer will describe one cause or one effect in a single paragraph. However, if the paragraph gets long and unwieldy, it can be split into two or three paragraphs. Your essay may focus mainly on the causes, mainly on the effects, or both equally.
6. **There are several common structures.** One common structure is the block structure. When using the block structure, there could be one cause with several effects, or there could be several causes with one effect. Another common structure is the chain structure, where one cause leads to an effect, that effect leads to another effect, and a chain reaction occurs. Regardless of the structure, be specific about what the causes and effects are.



Vocabulary

Indicating a cause

owing to
a key factor
because
since
due to
one reason
since this occurred
the first cause

Indicating an effect

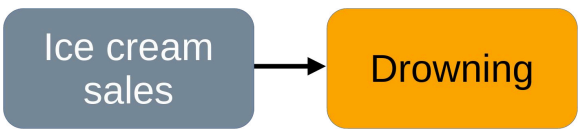
as a result
resulting in
consequently
as a consequence
therefore
so
thus
the first effect

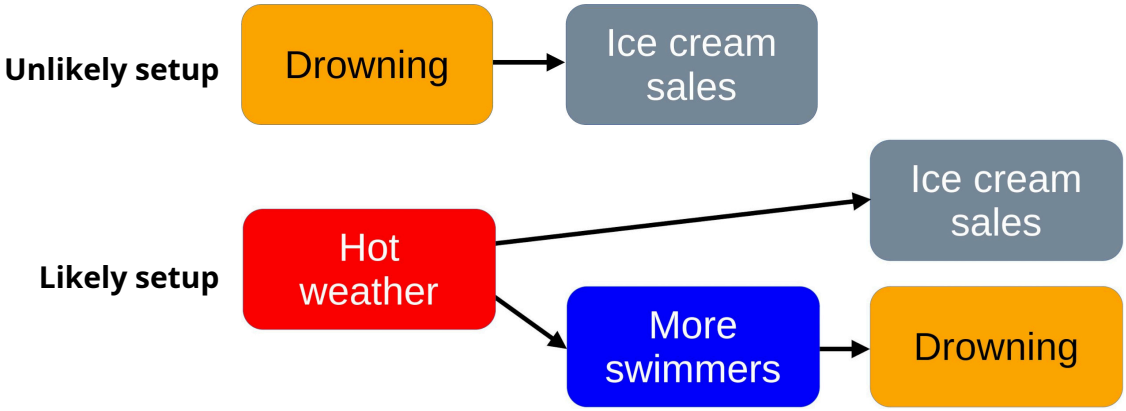
Correlation is Not Causation

Correlation is not causation. Another way of putting this is, *maybe you can find a pattern, but that doesn't mean one thing causes another*. This is easiest to see through examples.

1. Ice cream sales and deaths by drowning are both low in winter and high in summer. Does buying ice cream cause drowning?
2. Ex-smokers are more likely to die of lung cancer than current smokers. Does stopping smoking cause lung cancer?
3. Children that watch a lot of TV are the most violent. Does watching TV make you violent?
4. The more firemen are sent to a fire, the more damage is done. Are firemen dangerous?
5. Children with tutors get worse grades than children without tutors. Are tutors harmful?

Unlikely setup

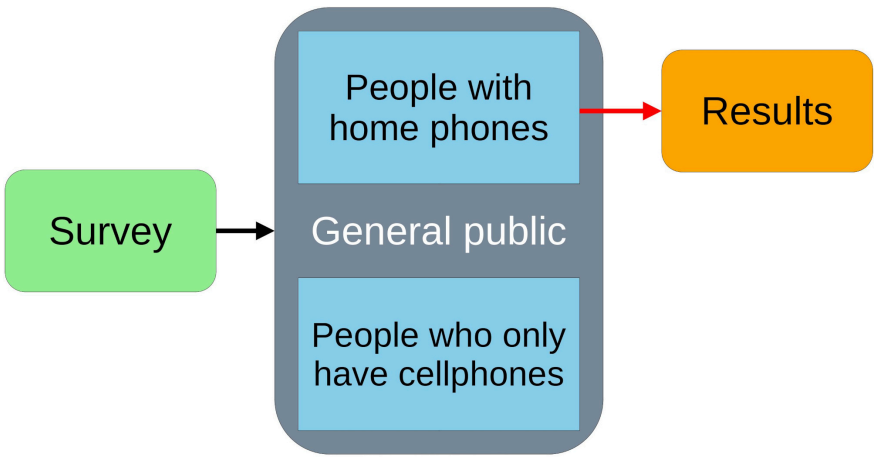




We can often use common sense to determine whether one thing causes another, but some situations are complex and difficult to prove. Some university-level courses delve deeply into the subject. For the sake of this essay, be clear about what you think causes what, and why. If something is a partial cause, a possible cause, or one of several causes, write that.

Confounding happens when a third variable is a cause of both variables we are considering. This is also called a causal fork. In the ice-cream-and-drowning-deaths example depicted above, hot weather is a third variable, likely to cause an increase in both ice cream sales and number of deaths by drowning.

Selection bias is another reason that we sometimes find patterns in data that look like causation but aren't. For example, a newspaper might conduct a survey to find out what newspapers are popular. If the survey is conducted by telephone using home phones (landlines), it is likely to under-count younger adults who only own cellphones. Similarly, if the survey is conducted during the day, people who work 9-5 jobs won't be included, and if it's conducted in the evening, people who work night jobs won't be included.



Qualifying Statements

If you aren't sure whether something is true, qualify the statements using expressions such as these: could / could have, may / may have, might / might have, slight impact, some impact, perhaps, possible, potential.

Example Essays

1. Why Our Forests Are Burning
2. Dressing for Success: The Controversy and Benefits of School Uniforms

3. Children's Greatest Threat: Reading Digitally
4. Do Social Media Platforms Affect Teenagers' Communication Skills?
5. The Drastic Change in Education and Rehabilitation

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Cause & Effect Essay 1

Why Our Forests Are Burning

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Composition and Literature
August 28, 2019

Forestry ranks among British Columbia's most lucrative industries, generating billions of dollars in export revenue and providing jobs for over 200,000 workers. However, forest fires pose a big threat to the viability of the business; in the past two years, fire has destroyed some 24,000 square kilometres of British Columbia forests. The resulting costs to the province in loss of revenue, purchase and use of expensive equipment, and overtime wages have reached nearly half a billion dollars (Lindsay, 2018). Though lightning strikes and human carelessness continue to be the leading causes of forest fires, global warming has intensified the danger in recent years.

In order to spread, fire needs fuel, oxygen, and heat. Biomass production and vegetative growth provide fuel for forest fires and the photosynthesis of living green organisms creates oxygen (Nix, 2018). When these natural combustibles reach 572ºF, gas in the steam given off reacts with oxygen to reach its flash point with a burst of flame, creating an uncontrolled forest fire.

There are three primary classes of forest fires, depending on the types of fuels involved and their moisture content. Surface fires typically burn readily but at a low intensity; crown fires generally result from intense rising ground fire heat and occur in the higher sections of draping trees; ground fires are the most infrequent type of fire but make for very intense blazes that can potentially destroy all vegetation and organic manner, leaving only bare earth. These largest fires actually create their own winds and weather, increasing the flow of oxygen and "feeding" the fire (Nix, 2018).

Naturally caused forest fires are usually started by dry lightning, where drought accompanies a stormy weather disturbance. Lightning randomly strikes the earth an average of 100 times each second and has caused some of the most notable woodland fire disasters in North America. Because they often occur in isolated locations with limited access, lightning fires burn more acres than human-caused starts (Nix, 2018).

In 2018, between April 1 and August 27, humans were responsible for starting more than 420 of about 1,950 wildfires in British Columbia. Campfires, cigarettes, flares, and car accidents are some of the most common human causes (Smart, 2018). During periods of heightened fire activity, these wildfires divert critical resources away from the naturally caused wildfires that can't be prevented. The Wildfire Service lumps human activities that spark fires into broad categories, including smoking, electrical, and structure or vehicle fires that spread. About 23 percent of fires started by humans fall under the broad umbrella of "incendiary devices," which include matches, lighters, flare guns, and others. About 22 per cent spread from campfires. And about the same number begin with open fires, which are larger fires that include burn barrels, pile burning, and large-scale industrial burning (Smart, 2018).

Today, climate change is increasing both the frequency and intensity of wildfires; severe droughts, declining snowpack, more frequent thunderstorms and extreme heat due to rapid warming in the Arctic are all contributing factors. Early in 2018, the World Meteorological Organization noted that the years 2015, 2016, and 2017 were clearly

warmer than any year prior to 2015 and, in BC, numerous heat records were broken across the province in July 2018 (Riley, 2018).

Prolonged periods of drought cause forest floors to become lined with dry, dead wood. This combustible material becomes fuel for wildfires and, in hot, dry conditions, a strike of lightning or a carelessly discarded cigarette can be incendiary. Ensuing fires can rip through forests, quickly becoming a dangerous crown fire that burns from treetop to treetop. We can attribute some of these hot, dry conditions to the weakening of the jet stream, the air current that drives weather conditions in the northern hemisphere. The jet stream gets its energy from the temperature difference between Arctic areas and equatorial regions. That temperature difference is getting smaller, so that means our jet stream is getting stagnant and it stalls. A weaker jet stream means hot and dry areas stay that way. The result has obvious implications for wildfires (Riley, 2018).

Adaptation to a new climate-fuelled fire season will prove difficult. Most fire ecologists advocate for prescribed burns, whereby intentionally lit fires burn off the excess fuel in the forest. Letting fires burn may diminish the possibility of catastrophic fires in the future by reducing the amount of fuel built up in the forest. But past forestry-management practices favoured extinguishing wildfires as soon as they started, which has also contributed to increasingly devastating mega-fires. Climate change on top of fire suppression has made the situation much worse. Even if we stopped producing greenhouse gases today, we would continue to warm for the next 50 to 100 years because of the lag in our climate system (Riley, 2018). We are going to continue to warm, so the time to act is now.

Word count: 819

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Cause & Effect Essay 2

Dressing for Success: The Controversy and Benefits of School Uniforms

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May 15th, 2022

Across history, uniforms have been seen as a form of conformity and control in religion and the army. Now, uniforms are a versatile solution to a myriad of problems occurring at schools. While this is a controversial topic, many schools claim that uniforms improve students' performance in school, particularly their attendance, disciplinary problems, and graduation rates.

Whether it was a badge in the medieval era used to indicate certain clans or pleated skirts worn to express school pride, uniforms are currently associated with privilege and elitism. In reality, uniforms were created to equal the playing field. The first school uniform known to mankind was made in the U.K. for British schools. Its purpose was to ensure that all students, regardless of their family's financial status, have equal clothing options (Scott, 2014). This idea has now faded, with some arguing that uniforms limit students' self-expression and creativity and can be a financial burden for families. Nevertheless, uniforms have been on the rise in the U.S., with "more than 40 percent of public schools and preschools in U.S. cities" (Bhattarai, 2019) now requiring uniforms.

Moreover, school uniforms have been found to increase attendance rates. One of the prevalent issues schools face is the decrease in students' attendance in high school. A recent University of Houston study suggests that school uniforms can positively affect school attendance rates, particularly for females. In a study conducted in "160 public schools in a large urban school district" in the U.S. from 1993 to 2006, researchers found that "once uniforms were mandated, the school district was more likely to retain its female students at all grade levels" (Emery, 2010). According to Emery (2010), the implementation of school uniforms resulted in a decrease of one day in annual school absences among middle and high school girls. Researchers suggest that increasing attendance rates among students is very difficult, making this difference significant.

Additionally, school uniforms have been associated with a decrease in disciplinary issues. According to a study conducted at Youngstown State University, wearing school uniforms can be beneficial in managing discipline and attendance issues (Draa, 2006). Furthermore, after examining "test scores and attendance, graduation, and suspension rates from 1994 to 2002 at 64 high schools in Ohio's eight largest public school districts" (Draa, 2006), they also found that the "mean expulsion rates dipped by 0.6 expulsion per 100 students in the years during which uniforms were required" (Draa, 2006). These results indicate that wearing uniforms in school creates a more organized learning environment with fewer behavior problems.

Furthermore, it has been shown that the requirement for school uniforms is linked to a substantial increase in graduation rates. According to research on public schools, "the mean graduation rates rose nearly 11 percent at schools that require uniforms, compared to pre-uniform years" (Draa, 2006). Similarly, research shows that uniforms increase discipline, which is a central part of academic excellence. In research published in the International Journal of Educational Management, researchers emphasized the significant role school uniforms play in maintaining school discipline and enhancing academic performance (Baumann, 2022). The findings suggest that while uniforms may

not be the sole contributor to academic success, they are a contributing element that can lead to improved graduation rates.

School uniforms were initially created for equality, but now they have become a controversial topic. Despite the debate, more schools have been requiring school uniforms in recent years for improved attendance, discipline, and graduation rates. Some argue that uniforms increase academic performance and create a better learning environment, and others claim that school uniforms are restrictive and expensive. While each student has their own specific needs and that uniforms may not be most suitable for everyone, their potential to enhance students' academic experience is evident, highlighting their overall beneficial impact.

Word count: 642

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Cause & Effect Essay 3

Children's Greatest Threat: Reading Digitally

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May 14th, 2024

In the past few decades, the popularity of digital media has risen, especially so because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Everything from shopping to communicating has become digital, and along with the popularity of such digital media, even education has become more digital-based. According to a study, 98% of households with children aged 8 and under have mobile devices (López-Escribano, Carmen et al., 2021). Children have more exposure to digital content and spend more time digitally reading. Despite being common, however, reading digitally negatively affects children's comprehension skills.

One aspect of reading digitally is digital text, which lacks the physical properties of paper. This makes it difficult to annotate the text, thus decreasing the engagement children have with the text (Dixon, 2023). Without annotation, such as highlighting and underlining keywords as you read, active reading is nearly impossible. The lack of physical properties also makes linking your memory to how far you've read the page or book difficult, while this type of information retention is possible with print reading (Pomeroy, 2024). Skimming through pages and setting the words as information becomes harder and requires cognitive effort with digital text because once the text is off the screen, "it's gone, out of sight and out of mind" (Dixon, 2023). Digital text leads to less interaction compared to print, an alternative to reading digitally.

The language choice of digital text further influences children unfavorably. Digital media, such as blogs and social media, typically have a lower linguistic quality of text compared to print reading. For example, there is a "prevalence of contractions, abbreviations, and colloquial expressions" (Han, 2024), which leads to informal and shorter content. The simple language of digital text signifies less comprehension and focus needed for children to understand the text, despite the fact that children have not fully mastered the basics of vocabulary and grammar (Pomeroy, 2024).

In addition, digital reading is usually done through the small screens of smartphones and tablets. The screen time may lead to issues with children's eyes, especially because they are still developing. One example is eye fatigue, which happens when people squint to see their screens and strain their muscles. This causes difficulty concentrating and headaches. Another example is dry eye syndrome. When children look at their screens, they tend to forget to blink. This leads to dry eyes, which feel uncomfortable and may make reading agonizing. When the screen time extends, it can also lead to blurred vision, which occurs when the eyes stay focused on the screen for long periods of time (AuYeung, 2022). When children have optical issues that lead to concentration difficulties, comprehension becomes more difficult.

Reading digitally also harms children because of cognitive load. As Dixton (2023) explains, it "is the amount of mental energy you are using to perform a task." The more you try to multitask, the higher cognitive load is. Reading digitally is typically done on devices that have access to the internet. Those devices are "a source of extraneous cognitive load" (Dixon, 2023), and they have a lot of information that is irrelevant to what students are reading. That information places demands on people's working memory, and it can cause overstimulation, which will lead to children learning how to be distracted rather than gaining comprehension skills (Heubeck et al., 2024). Even when

children are opening a browser with only the text they want to read, they are only a click away from entertainment like social media and games. Some studies show that people tend to check their social media while reading, and since younger people have less impulse control, they may tend to check even more so (Pomeroy, 2024). Even without notifications, a psychological pull remains (Dickinson, 2022). Reducing the extraneous load, or in other words, replacing digital reading, will help children comprehend text better.

Children reading digitally results in reading without physical properties of paper, consuming text of low linguistic quality, putting a burden on their eyes, and overloading their mental capacity. All of these result in some way or another with negative impact on children's comprehension skills, especially because children's brains are still developing. While reducing the time children spend consuming digital texts for educational purposes will be difficult, children should be provided with printed material to not further deteriorate their comprehension skills.

Word count: 724

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Cause & Effect Essay 4

Do Social Media Platforms Affect Teenagers' Communication Skills?

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April 26, 2024

Social media is often perceived as a growing concern for parents regarding its negative effects on the younger generation. Social media have emerged and spread at a high speed, especially among teenagers, who now spend one-third of their day using devices. Researchers have found out that "22% of teenagers log on to their favorite social media site more than 10 times a day" (Pediatrics, 2011). When teenagers are constantly exposed to social media, it is not hard to imagine that it dramatically affects their communication skills. Three noticeable effects of social media are losing confidence in communicating face-to-face, inducing cyberbullying, and taking away focus from tasks and conversations.

The first effect is that teenagers are losing interest in face-to-face interaction with others. By learning to communicate online, teenagers are starting to lose confidence in direct communications, according to the Child Mind Institute (Ehmke, n.d.). The Social Media Victims Law Center states, "If a teen's social media engagement outweighs their in-person interactions, they may struggle to identify critical social cues such as body language, facial expressions, vocal tones, and personal space" (Bergman, n.d.). Losing valuable skills that are critical for interacting with others could result in misunderstanding others and lowering the motivation to communicate with others effectively. As a consequence, teenagers could lose confidence in communicating with others.

Secondly, long-term exposure to social media increases the probability for teenagers to get targeted for cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is "bullying that takes place over digital devices, which includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else" (What Is Cyberbullying, 2021). According to research by the Pew Research Center, out of all teenagers in America, about half of them have experienced at least one form of cyberbullying (Jiang, 2018). Studies have found that when teenagers experience cyberbullying, it leads to lowered self esteem (Cénat, 2014). Moreover, cyberbullying can induce various mental illnesses such as depression, social anxiety, and mental instability. For that reason, teenagers become fearful when interacting with others. In addition, cyberbullying often contains extreme and aggressive words which could impact teenagers' ability to develop empathy and understanding. These problems all pose an effect towards teenagers' development of effective communication skills.

Lastly, social media draws away teenagers' focus from assignments and conversations. Social media constantly distracts teenagers' attention through notifications, and teenagers cannot focus on the work they are required to do at the moment. "31% of teens said they lost focus in class because they were checking their cell phones, and 49% said using technology for reasons unrelated to class, or "off-task" use, was distracting to them" (Jiang, 2018). For example, some teenagers might be unable to pay attention to class because they do not want to miss out on the "BeReal" alert, which requires one to take a photo in less than two minutes when a notification is sent out once every day. Furthermore, teenagers could neglect face-to-face communication because they are too focused on notifications from social media. "Phubbing", the act of ignoring the person one is with and giving attention to one's mobile phone instead (PHUBBING | English Meaning – Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), has increased significantly in recent years, and

research by Thrive Global has found out that 44% of people have engaged in “phubbing” more than twice a day (Hsu, 2023). Constant distraction from social media leads to a reduced attention span, which ultimately results in decreasing the ability to follow the conversation while talking with others.

The rapid growth of social media among teenagers has a tremendous effect on their communication skills. Social media causes teenagers to lose interest in face-to-face interaction, exposing them to cyberbullying and distracting their focus. This all results in students not being able to fully develop their communication skills, which are fundamental in their years to come. Social media induces various threats to teenagers’ growth, and to combat this problem, urgent action is needed.

Word count: 662

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Cause & Effect Essay 5

The Drastic Change in Education and Rehabilitation

Terry Hargreaves
Central High School
May 14th, 2024

If ten randomly selected people were asked whether they had played *games* before, everyone would answer the same: yes. Yet, if the same people were to be asked whether they had played *video games* before, the answers may vary. Some, such as children and teenagers, may have been banned from playing it due to their parents' beliefs that video games are harmful to their health and education. Although both are types of games, the latter has a tendency to be biased and harmful simply because it has long been believed to be so. However, recent studies have shown positive effects of video games on both the learning process in the classroom and during rehabilitation in therapy.

Video games require a number of skills, such as navigation, memory, timing, patience, communication, and a variety of others essential to excelling in them. For instance, Super Mario 64 requires the use of the hippocampus, a part of the brain used for navigation, spatial processing, and memory. Repeated usage of the hippocampus leads to an increase in gray matter, the tissues in the brain that process information (Teh, 2021). The increase in gray matter also allows gamers to better control their motor movements and increase their cognitive processing, which includes memory, decision-making, language, and attention (Wisner, 2021). Using these advantageous aspects, teachers are incorporating video games as a tool for education. For instance, the rate of students dropping out of science, technology, engineering, and math programs, also known as STEM, has been increasing. Therefore, it led to the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology recognizing the need "to create the STEM workforce of the future" (Thomas, 2021). Research has shown that one of the reasons students drop out of STEM programs is due to the difficulty of calculus (Thomas, 2021). Consequently, the University of Oklahoma developed a calculus game to help guide students through the learning process. According to a study conducted by Texas A&M, a similar calculus game called "Variant:Limits" significantly boosted students' scores in introductory calculus, with the score corresponding with the amount of time spent playing it (Watts, 2019). Although video games are often seen as a hindrance and a distraction to education, they are becoming increasingly popular as a means to enhance the educational experience in the classroom.

Not only are video games effective in the education process, but they also enhance the patients' engagement rate in therapy. A common issue during therapy is the demand for patients to devote time to lengthy sessions with therapists. In other words, it requires patience and endurance of repetition from patients. However, the reality of the patient's adherence to long-term rehabilitation programs has been reported to be as low as 23% (Jahed, 2015). As a means to resolve this issue, therapists have been looking to video games for a solution by incorporating "console-based therapy," a rehabilitation process where patients engage in virtual games such as golf to improve their balance using consoles. Research has shown console-based therapy contributes to the overall improvement in patient engagement, finding an increase in compliance, playfulness, and endurance. As a result, researchers found that it allows patients to better cope with the repetitive nature of rehabilitation they often struggle with (Deutsch JE, 2008). No longer is rehabilitation frustrating and dull; rather, the use of consoles and virtual video games makes the process challenging and engaging. Console-based therapy is not a means to

replace therapists but more of a tool with the “potential to improve compliance rates and thereby improve the functional outcome” of patients (Jahed, 2015).

To conclude, video games are becoming an essential tool during both learning in the classroom and rehabilitation throughout therapy. It highlights the importance of being open-minded and flexible to be able to accept innovative ideas. Perhaps one day, video games may help assist in the process and become one of the mainstream tools used during education and therapy.

Word count: 663

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Narrative Essay

A **narrative essay** recounts a personal experience—not just any personal experience, but usually one that taught an important life lesson. Narrative essays are a staple of high school writing, and they're often also found in university writing.

Many narrative essays are about the author's own experiences, and these are called *personal narrative essays*. Another type of narrative essay is the *historical narrative essay*, which is third-party writing about a historical figure.

The structure for a narrative essay is usually straightforward—typically the essay is presented in a series of chronological paragraphs. In the introduction, the thesis might be implied, although its reaffirmation in the conclusion may be more explicit, especially if the writer wants to stress the life lesson they learned through the experience described.

One common structure for a narrative essay.

Techniques

1. **Use a casual voice.** Unlike many other essay styles, the narrative essay need not be academic. Be flexible with the grammar and vocabulary, and if the essay is personal, using the word "I" is generally acceptable.
2. **Tell the story first.** This will become the body. After that's done, read it, and see what you want to emphasize in the introduction and conclusion.
3. **Read it aloud.** Typically, your story should sound like something you would write or say. Read it out loud to yourself and see if it does, and what parts are unnatural.
4. **Consider the audience.** If you're a high school student writing about your own experiences, sound like it. There should be something in your essay—either the style or content—that you wouldn't or couldn't have written five years ago.
5. **Use fiction techniques.** Many of these ideas might work well.

Example Personal Essays

1. Seth French – You've Gotta' Try This! (2020)
2. Emily Hanna – Nonsense Poems in the Big Woods of My Childhood (2014)
3. Jourdan Anderson – A Freedman Writes His Former Master (1865)
4. George Orwell – A Hanging (1931)
5. Virginia Woolf – The Death of the Moth (1942)

Example Historical Essays

6. Carlos Rivera – The Legend of the North Pond Hermit (2022)

More Essays

These are presumably still under copyright, so they aren't hosted on this website.

- Sherman Alexie – Superman and Me (1998)
- Tim Kreider – I Know What You Think of Me (2013)
- Amy Tan – Fish Cheeks (1987)

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Narrative Essay 1

You've Gotta' Try This!

Seth French
Oklahoma State University Library
2020

My obsession with trying different types of food began in my dad's second floor apartment in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The apartment was "cool" because it was on the second floor. It had stone steps leading upward to the small patio and doorway that was teeming with many varieties of potted plants. A person passing by could see the soft blanket of colors that the flowers made against the railing of the patio – an urban jungle. My dad always had an interest in things that many, who are familiar with gender roles, would call "feminine." These interests and passions consisted of potted plants, metro-sexual fashion, wine, and of course, fine cuisine. My dad was the type of person who would go to the grocery store to buy the freshest ingredients possible to try out the most recent recipe he had read in either his French or German cookbook. He also enjoyed coming home with the most foul-smelling cheese you can imagine because according to him "the stinky cheese is the best!" This sense of culinary adventure also extended into our experiences on the nights when dad didn't feel like cooking.

Dad always had a way of finding what he called a "hole-in-the-wall place." He always told me that "the hole-in-the-wall places always have the best food!" and boy, did we live by this mantra. We often found ourselves at restaurants where we were the only pair that spoke English. We would end up in the Mexican part of town at restaurants with the most delicious, authentic food in town. We would also go to many different Asian restaurants and on special occasions, we ended up at the nicest French restaurant in town and ate delicious, buttery escargot and flaky bread.

My most vivid memory of adventuring into the world of food occurred at a small, "hole-in-the-wall" Japanese restaurant called Ichiban. I was seven years old, and I loved Pokémon. The place was barely even visible from the road. When you walked through the ordinary glass, you found yourself inside of the elegant world of Ichiban. Little red cushioned chairs were neatly placed around square wooden tables. The red cushions gained even more vibrancy due to the overall reddish glow of the restaurant's interior. A soft, red lighting beamed from lanterns that seemed to float in the air, like lonely balloons that had been left behind after escaping a child's clutch. Bottles of Kikkoman brand soy sauce found their homes atop the square wooden tables, and seemed to accessorize the little red cushioned chairs. When we were seated, I did as any restaurant patron does: I looked at the menu and sipped on the glass of ice water in front of me.

As I was exploring the menu my dad leaned over and said to me: "You've gotta' try Tako salad!" The first thing I thought of when my dad said "Tako salad" was the yummy combination of ground beef, cheese, pico de gallo, salsa, a dollop of sour cream and various toppings of the consumer's choosing, that would all be served up in a crunchy, taco shell bowl. Thus the name "Taco salad." When my dad asked me to try a food, I was always expected to give the dish a try. I was never that kid who got chicken or spaghetti at every restaurant.

I was a fearless and open-minded child who could never be labeled as picky eater. When my dad said we had to try the Tako salad, I of course agreed to order it. When it arrived, I realized that this was not the Taco salad I had envisioned. In front of me was a pure white bowl in the shape of a flower. In its center were colorful bits of cucumber with

sesame seeds, fresh strips of something soft and green, and glistening pieces of white edged in pinkish purple. My dad was smiling at me.

I picked up my chopsticks and put one of the thin white slices into my mouth. It was strange, chewy, vinegary….delicious! We had ordered Tako Sun, cold octopus and vegetables in a sweet, savory vinegar sauce. That day at Ichiban, a miraculous transformation happened: a seven year old girl, who loved Pokémon and was seated on a red cushioned chair, fell in love with Asian cuisine. I began to make connections between food and culture. Japan is an island nation surrounded by bodies of water. With this abundance of water, the Japanese enjoy many seafood dishes that are not typically served in other cultures. One of those strange creatures is octopus. The simple elegant furnishings of the restaurant and the beautiful white bowl and the elegant arrangement of each item in it spoke of the Japanese attention to meticulous detail and fondness for precise rituals.

I am forever grateful to my dad for taking me out of my comfort zone. He made me give different and exotic foods a try. This did something even deeper for me than tantalize my taste buds: it made me love and appreciate cultures other than my own. Food is now the focal point of my experience with other cultures, and I have blossomed into a lifelong cross-cultural “foodie” thanks to the simple phrase my dad loved to say: “You’ve gotta’ try this!”

Word count: 888

Narrative Essay 2

Nonsense Poems in the Big Woods of My Childhood

Emily Hanna
Excelsior University
April 16, 2014

"The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea [in] a beautiful pea-green boat" (Lear, 1870). My grandmother's voice intones through the haze of one of my earliest childhood memories. I was four years old, lying on the earth-tone coverlet of my grandparent's bed in the loft bedroom of their asymmetrical 1970s hippy house. It was naptime. The sun streamed through the floor-to-ceiling windows in the kitchen and made its way up the hallway. I was drifting off, but the familiar words penetrated the early stages of slumber. My grandmother has a beautiful voice, and every word of Edward Lear's nineteenth-century nonsense poem was spoken in just the right pitch and rhythm. "They took some honey, and plenty of money, [wrapped] up in a five-pound note," her voice continued soothingly. I was losing the battle with sleep, but I knew how the narrative ended. The next week on my day at Gram's house, the book was *Teddy Bear Picnic*, which she would sometimes sing, or *Leaves from a Child's Garden of Verses*. I was not particular; I loved them all. Many of the peaceful moments of my early childhood had the same features: my mom or my grandma, a book, and a warm, safe place. In the present, I return to books, not only for mental expansion, but also for the familiarity and stability of summer naptimes and homeschool afternoons.

"Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs" (Wilder, 1932). The voice in this memory is different, younger for one thing. My mother was only twenty-five, but she had two youngsters and a toddler around her on the couch. I was five, and these were the early days of my education, which I spent at home with my two brothers. Every day after lunch, Mum read to us from a chapter book. A favorite of ours was the *Little House on the Prairie* series, and our copy of the first book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, sported a missing cover, cracked spine, and bent pages. I can recall with distinct clarity the motion of my mother turning down the page to mark our place in the familiar tale. My later school years do not have this idyllic quality. I have become an exacting perfectionist who agonizes over every word read and written, but the habits from my childhood of listening—focus, attention to detail, enthusiasm, and organization—continue to bring me peace.

"How do you spell *frog*," my seven-year-old self demanded of my mother, who was kneading a loaf of bread at the kitchen counter. For a child who loved books, I struggled to read independently, and it affected my early ability to write. Yet, I clearly wanted to write and followed my indefatigable mother around asking for her help.

"Sound it out," she encouraged. "F-raw-g." I looked at her skeptically, not feeling the sound-it-out game. I was more interested in my story about a boy and his pet frog. "Or look it up."

"I don't know how," I insisted impatiently.

"Then make your best guess."

Eventually, the book was finished and illustrated, despite a few unconventionally-spelled words. Within a year or two, I learned to read and jumped from a first-grade reading level to a high-school reading level in the course of a few months. Being conventional is

overrated. At seven, I never suspected I was behind, and because my parents did not pressure me, I caught back up without ever knowing. Learning to read was another quiet, happy experience. Now, other things do not come easily, and the outside environment is not as kind. I suffer more on these occasions, but in time, I catch up when I am ready.

“And hand in hand [on] the edge of the sand, [they] danced by the light of the moon, the moon, the moon. They danced by the light of the moon” (Lear, 1870). I was gone from the present as my grandmother closed the shiny hardcover copy of *The Owl and the Pussy-Cat* and placed it back on the low bookshelf beside the bed. The present is not always as sunny as that day in 1996, but my grandmother’s voice and the words it repeated always keep me steady.

Word count: 731

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Narrative Essay 3

A Freedman Writes His Former Master

Jourdan Anderson

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865.

To my old Master, Colonel P. H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee.

Sir:

I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this, for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living. It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again, and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville Hospital, but one of the neighbors told me that Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get $25 a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy (the folks call her Mrs. Anderson), and the children, Milly, Jane, and Grundy, go to school and are learning well. The teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshal-General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At $25 a month for me, and $2 a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to $11,680. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the negroes any more

than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good-looking girls. You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine. I would rather stay here and starve and die, if it come to that, than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters. You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood. The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

From your old servant,

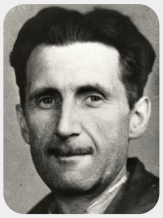
Jourdon Anderson

P.S.— Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

Word count: 812

Narrative Essay 4

George Orwell is the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair (June 25, 1903–January 21, 1950). He was an English poet, novelist, and journalist. One of his famous essays, *Politics and the English Language*, examines common pitfalls of political expression. He is perhaps best known for his novels, including *Animal Farm* (1945) and the dystopian classic *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).



A Hanging

George Orwell
The Adelphi
August 1931

It was in Burma, a sodden morning of the rains. A sickly light, like yellow tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard. We were waiting outside the condemned cells, a row of sheds fronted with double bars, like small animal cages. Each cell measured about ten feet by ten and was quite bare within except for a plank bed and a pot of drinking water. In some of them brown silent men were squatting at the inner bars, with their blankets draped round them. These were the condemned men, due to be hanged within the next week or two.

One prisoner had been brought out of his cell. He was a Hindu, a puny wisp of a man, with a shaven head and vague liquid eyes. He had a thick, sprouting moustache, absurdly too big for his body, rather like the moustache of a comic man on the films. Six tall Indian warders were guarding him and getting him ready for the gallows. Two of them stood by with rifles and fixed bayonets, while the others handcuffed him, passed a chain through his handcuffs and fixed it to their belts, and lashed his arms tight to his sides. They crowded very close about him, with their hands always on him in a careful, caressing grip, as though all the while feeling him to make sure he was there. It was like men handling a fish which is still alive and may jump back into the water. But he stood quite unresisting, yielding his arms limply to the ropes, as though he hardly noticed what was happening.

Eight o'clock struck and a bugle call, desolately thin in the wet air, floated from the distant barracks. The superintendent of the jail, who was standing apart from the rest of us, moodily prodding the gravel with his stick, raised his head at the sound. He was an army doctor, with a grey toothbrush moustache and a gruff voice. "For God's sake hurry up, Francis," he said irritably. "The man ought to have been dead by this time. Aren't you ready yet?"

Francis, the head jailer, a fat Dravidian in a white drill suit and gold spectacles, waved his black hand. "Yes sir, yes sir," he bubbled. "All iss satisfactorily prepared. The hangman iss waiting. We shall proceed."

"Well, quick march, then. The prisoners can't get their breakfast till this job's over."

We set out for the gallows. Two warders marched on either side of the prisoner, with their rifles at the slope; two others marched close against him, gripping him by arm and shoulder, as though at once pushing and supporting him. The rest of us, magistrates and the like, followed behind. Suddenly, when we had gone ten yards, the procession stopped

short without any order or warning. A dreadful thing had happened–a dog, come goodness knows whence, had appeared in the yard. It came bounding among us with a loud volley of barks, and leapt round us wagging its whole body, wild with glee at finding so many human beings together. It was a large woolly dog, half Airedale, half pariah. For a moment it pranced round us, and then, before anyone could stop it, it had made a dash for the prisoner, and jumping up tried to lick his face. Everyone stood aghast, too taken aback even to grab at the dog.

“Who let that bloody brute in here?” said the superintendent angrily. “Catch it, someone!”

A warder, detached from the escort, charged clumsily after the dog, but it danced and gambolled just out of his reach, taking everything as part of the game. A young Eurasian jailer picked up a handful of gravel and tried to stone the dog away, but it dodged the stones and came after us again. Its yaps echoed from the jail walls. The prisoner, in the grasp of the two warders, looked on incuriously, as though this was another formality of the hanging. It was several minutes before someone managed to catch the dog. Then we put my handkerchief through its collar and moved off once more, with the dog still straining and whimpering.

It was about forty yards to the gallows. I watched the bare brown back of the prisoner marching in front of me. He walked clumsily with his bound arms, but quite steadily, with that bobbing gait of the Indian who never straightens his knees. At each step his muscles slid neatly into place, the lock of hair on his scalp danced up and down, his feet printed themselves on the wet gravel. And once, in spite of the men who gripped him by each shoulder, he stepped slightly aside to avoid a puddle on the path.

It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man. When I saw the prisoner step aside to avoid the puddle, I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide. This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All the organs of his body were working –bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming–all toiling away in solemn foolery. His nails would still be growing when he stood on the drop, when he was falling through the air with a tenth of a second to live. His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned – reasoned even about puddles. He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes, with a sudden snap, one of us would be gone – one mind less, one world less.

The gallows stood in a small yard, separate from the main grounds of the prison, and overgrown with tall prickly weeds. It was a brick erection like three sides of a shed, with planking on top, and above that two beams and a crossbar with the rope dangling. The hangman, a grey-haired convict in the white uniform of the prison, was waiting beside his machine. He greeted us with a servile crouch as we entered. At a word from Francis the two warders, gripping the prisoner more closely than ever, half led, half pushed him to the gallows and helped him clumsily up the ladder. Then the hangman limbed up and fixed the rope round the prisoner’s neck.

We stood waiting, five yards away. The warders had formed in a rough circle round the gallows. And then, when the noose was fixed, the prisoner began crying out on his god. It was a high, reiterated cry of “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!”, not urgent and fearful like a prayer or a cry for help, but steady, rhythmical, almost like the tolling of a bell. The dog answered the sound with a whine. The hangman, still standing on the gallows, produced a small cotton bag like a flour bag and drew it down over the prisoner’s face. But the sound, muffled by the cloth, still persisted, over and over again: “Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!”

The hangman climbed down and stood ready, holding the lever. Minutes seemed to pass. The steady, muffled crying from the prisoner went on and on, “Ram! Ram! Ram!” never faltering for an instant. The superintendent, his head on his chest, was slowly poking the ground with his stick; perhaps he was counting the cries, allowing the prisoner a fixed number – fifty, perhaps, or a hundred. Everyone had changed colour. The Indians had gone grey like bad coffee, and one or two of the bayonets were wavering. We looked at the lashed, hooded man on the drop, and listened to his cries – each cry another second of life; the same thought was in all our minds: oh, kill him quickly, get it over, stop that abominable noise!

Suddenly the superintendent made up his mind. Throwing up his head he made a swift motion with his stick. “Chalo!” he shouted almost fiercely.

There was a clanking noise, and then dead silence. The prisoner had vanished, and the rope was twisting on itself. I let go of the dog, and it galloped immediately to the back of the gallows; but when it got there it stopped short, barked, and then retreated into a corner of the yard, where it stood among the weeds, looking timorously out at us. We went round the gallows to inspect the prisoner’s body. He was dangling with his toes pointed straight downwards, very slowly revolving, as dead as a stone.

The superintendent reached out with his stick and poked the bare body; it oscillated, slightly. “He’s all right,” said the superintendent. He backed out from under the gallows, and blew out a deep breath. The moody look had gone out of his face quite suddenly. He glanced at his wrist-watch. “Eight minutes past eight. Well, that’s all for this morning, thank God.”

The warders unfixed bayonets and marched away. The dog, sobered and conscious of having misbehaved itself, slipped after them. We walked out of the gallows yard, past the condemned cells with their waiting prisoners, into the big central yard of the prison. The convicts, under the command of warders armed with lathis, were already receiving their breakfast. They squatted in long rows, each man holding a tin pannikin, while two warders with buckets marched round ladling out rice; it seemed quite a homely, jolly scene, after the hanging. An enormous relief had come upon us now that the job was done. One felt an impulse to sing, to break into a run, to snigger. All at once everyone began chattering gaily.

The Eurasian boy walking beside me nodded towards the way we had come, with a knowing smile: “Do you know, sir, our friend (he meant the dead man), when he heard his appeal had been dismissed, he pissed on the floor of his cell. From fright. –Kindly take one of my cigarettes, sir. Do you not admire my new silver case, sir? From the boxwallah, two rupees eight annas. Classy European style.”

Several people laughed – at what, nobody seemed certain.

Francis was walking by the superintendent, talking garrulously. “Well, sir, all hass passed off with the utmost satisfactoriness. It wass all finished – flick! like that. It iss not always so – oah, no! I have known cases where the doctor wass obliged to go beneath the gallows and pull the prisoner’s legs to ensure decease. Most disagreeable!”

“Wriggling about, eh? That’s bad,” said the superintendent.

“Ach, sir, it iss worse when they become refractory! One man, I recall, clung to the bars of hiss cage when we went to take him out. You will scarcely credit, sir, that it took six warders to dislodge him, three pulling at each leg. We reasoned with him. “My dear fellow,” we said, “think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!” But no, he would not listen! Ach, he wass very troublesome!”

I found that I was laughing quite loudly. Everyone was laughing. Even the superintendent grinned in a tolerant way. “You’d better all come out and have a drink,” he said quite genially. “I’ve got a bottle of whisky in the car. We could do with it.”

We went through the big double gates of the prison, into the road. “Pulling at his legs!” exclaimed a Burmese magistrate suddenly, and burst into a loud chuckling. We all began laughing again. At that moment Francis’s anecdote seemed extraordinarily funny. We all had a drink together, native and European alike, quite amicably. The dead man was a hundred yards away.

Word count: 1,969

Narrative Essay 5

Virginia Woolf (January 25, 1882–March 28, 1941) was a highly influential English author. She was born and raised in London, and subsequently lived in several cities around the country. She is known for various writing, including the essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929), a staple piece of feminist literature, and the novels *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

The Death of the Moth

Virginia Woolf
The Death of the Moth and Other Essays
1942

Moths that fly by day are not properly to be called moths; they do not excite that pleasant sense of dark autumn nights and ivy-blossom which the commonest yellow-underwing asleep in the shadow of the curtain never fails to rouse in us. They are hybrid creatures, neither gay like butterflies nor sombre like their own species. Nevertheless the present specimen, with his narrow hay-coloured wings, fringed with a tassel of the same colour, seemed to be content with life. It was a pleasant morning, mid-September, mild, benignant, yet with a keener breath than that of the summer months. The plough was already scoring the field opposite the window, and where the share had been, the earth was pressed flat and gleamed with moisture. Such vigour came rolling in from the fields and the down beyond that it was difficult to keep the eyes strictly turned upon the book. The rooks too were keeping one of their annual festivities; soaring round the tree tops until it looked as if a vast net with thousands of black knots in it had been cast up into the air; which, after a few moments sank slowly down upon the trees until every twig seemed to have a knot at the end of it. Then, suddenly, the net would be thrown into the air again in a wider circle this time, with the utmost clamour and vociferation, as though to be thrown into the air and settle slowly down upon the tree tops were a tremendously exciting experience.

The same energy which inspired the rooks, the ploughmen, the horses, and even, it seemed, the lean bare-backed downs, sent the moth fluttering from side to side of his square of the window-pane. One could not help watching him. One was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him. The possibilities of pleasure seemed that morning so enormous and so various that to have only a moth's part in life, and a day moth's at that, appeared a hard fate, and his zest in enjoying his meagre opportunities to the full, pathetic. He flew vigorously to one corner of his compartment, and, after waiting there a second, flew across to the other. What remained for him but to fly to a third corner and then to a fourth? That was all he could do, in spite of the size of the downs, the width of the sky, the far-off smoke of houses, and the romantic voice, now and then, of a steamer out at sea. What he could do he did. Watching him, it seemed as if a fibre, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body. As often as he crossed the pane, I could fancy that a thread of vital light became visible. He was little or nothing but life.

Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvellous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking

it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zig-zagging to show us the true nature of life. Thus displayed one could not get over the strangeness of it. One is apt to forget all about life, seeing it humped and bossed and garnished and cumbered so that it has to move with the greatest circumspection and dignity. Again, the thought of all that life might have been had he been born in any other shape caused one to view his simple activities with a kind of pity.

After a time, tired by his dancing apparently, he settled on the window ledge in the sun, and, the queer spectacle being at an end, I forgot about him. Then, looking up, my eye was caught by him. He was trying to resume his dancing, but seemed either so stiff or so awkward that he could only flutter to the bottom of the window-pane; and when he tried to fly across it he failed. Being intent on other matters I watched these futile attempts for a time without thinking, unconsciously waiting for him to resume his flight, as one waits for a machine, that has stopped momentarily, to start again without considering the reason of its failure. After perhaps a seventh attempt he slipped from the wooden ledge and fell, fluttering his wings, on to his back on the window sill. The helplessness of his attitude roused me. It flashed upon me that he was in difficulties; he could no longer raise himself; his legs struggled vainly. But, as I stretched out a pencil, meaning to help him to right himself, it came over me that the failure and awkwardness were the approach of death. I laid the pencil down again.

The legs agitated themselves once more. I looked as if for the enemy against which he struggled. I looked out of doors. What had happened there? Presumably it was midday, and work in the fields had stopped. Stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation. The birds had taken themselves off to feed in the brooks. The horses stood still. Yet the power was there all the same, massed outside indifferent, impersonal, not attending to anything in particular. Somehow it was opposed to the little hay-coloured moth. It was useless to try to do anything. One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again. It was superb this last protest, and so frantic that he succeeded at last in righting himself. One's sympathies, of course, were all on the side of life. Also, when there was nobody to care or to know, this gigantic effort on the part of an insignificant little moth, against a power of such magnitude, to retain what no one else valued or desired to keep, moved one strangely. Again, somehow, one saw life, a pure bead. I lifted the pencil again, useless though I knew it to be. But even as I did so, the unmistakable tokens of death showed themselves. The body relaxed, and instantly grew stiff. The struggle was over. The insignificant little creature now knew death. As I looked at the dead moth, this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder. Just as life had been strange a few minutes before, so death was now as strange. The moth having righted himself now lay most decently and uncomplainingly composed. O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am.

Word count: 1,191

Narrative Essay 6

The Legend of the North Pond Hermit

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August 5, 2022

For years, citizens around the area of Rome, Maine, have only jokingly blamed the 'North Pond Hermit', whenever possessions mysteriously vanished around their camps. They attributed the losses to a mythical man who no one had ever seen nor heard. However, after avoiding authorities for over a quarter of a century, the elusive man of local legend has finally been apprehended, much to the surprise of residents. While some are angry with the hermit for the crimes he committed over the years, others venerate him as a folk hero. Although his story is shrouded in mystery, authorities are gradually learning more about him by speaking with those who knew him years ago and talking to the fabled hermit himself.

The North Pond Hermit, Christopher Knight, is originally from Albion, Maine. According to people who knew him years ago, he spent his school years not doing anything noteworthy. Those who knew him earlier in life claimed he was a very smart, yet unremarkable individual. In high school, he did not have many friends but did not have any adversaries either (Associated Press, 2013). No source claimed to notice any odd behavior that could signify a harmful mental condition. Some believe the death of a cousin may have spurred his desire to be isolated from society. Others claim that, after the death of his father and the tragedy of Chernobyl, he decided to leave (Curtis, 2013). Even Knight himself seemed to not know the exact reason he left. There were no significant signs that Knight would one day march off into the wilderness alone, just two years after he graduated high school in 1986 (Curtis 2013). To old classmates and authorities, Knight is a conundrum.

Although Knight's camp was called "makeshift" by multiple sources, it was quite sophisticated. According to journalist Craig Crosby (2013), "He built a hut on a slope in the woods." His tent was facing in a direction at which he could best utilize the sunlight at all hours of the day in order to keep as warm as possible. He concealed his camp by covering any bright and shiny objects with dark colored tarps and bags, as well as moss. He also never lit a fire, as to further hide his whereabouts. The methods he used to veil his camp resemble military tactics, although he was never in the military. Despite the primitive look of his camp, Knight strategically masked his location to maintain his way of life (Crosby, 2013).

During the years he spent in the wild, Knight filled his time with hobbies and important tasks for his survival. Crosby (2013) writes that "he spent his days reading books and meditating." He also watched plants grow. However, more important to Knight's story was the startling amount of crime he committed over the time he lived in the wilderness. Knight claims to have stolen from around 300 campsites. He burglarized these campsites over 1,000 times in order to obtain the supplies and food he needed to survive (Curtis, 2013). Journalist Glenn Adams (2013) writes, "'He used us like his local Walmart,' said Harvey Chesley, the [Pine Tree] camp's facilities manager." Some people who lived in the area claimed that they knew about Knight's crimes for years and even left out food for him. However, after many years, Knight's crimes have reached an end.

The Pine Tree Camp, a camp for people with special needs, was burglarized multiple times, until finally camp leaders asked authorities to investigate. Sergeant Terry Hughes

had the idea to set up a camera and a trip wire alarm system that would notify him at home if someone came into the Pine Tree Camp dining facility to steal food at night after it was closed. Late at night, after the alarm system was assembled that day, Knight hit the trip wire. Hughes heard the signal and then saw Knight on camera. He quickly arrived at the camp and apprehended Knight (Crosby, 2013). Knight was found, not disheveled and dirty, as television and films often portray men who live alone in the wild, but he had a close-cut beard and short hair. He was also still wearing 1980s-style "aviator" glasses (Crosby, 2013). Hughes was the first person Knight spoke with since the 1990s, when he walked past somebody on a path and greeted him.

Since Knight's apprehension, he has been adjusting to life in jail. He was also interviewed about his actions and motives. Hughes reported that Knight acknowledged his actions were wrong and even appeared to show "shame and remorse" (Crosby, 2013). Despite confessing to over 1,000 robberies, Knight will only be tried for the burglary for which he was caught. "The 47-year-old hermit now awaits his future at the Kennebec County Jail, where he is being held in lieu of $5,000 cash bail on charges of burglary and theft" (Crosby, 2013). Meanwhile, according to writer Bill Chappell (2013), while in jail, Knight received an offer to pay his bail from a nonresident, as well as a marriage proposal from another individual—both of which he refused.

The public continues to have mixed feelings about the case. Although the people Knight stole from are furious that he was able to elude punishment for all of the crime he has committed over the years, old friends of his are raising money to help support him when he leaves jail (Associated Press, 2013). Knight is even being revered as a hero of sorts, by others. Stan Keach, a bluegrass artist from Belgrade, Maine, has written a song about Knight, called "We Don't Know the North Pond Hermit" (Burnham, 2013). In the song, Keach sings of Knight's life alone in the wild.

Nobody has a clear idea of why so many years ago a young man decided to separate himself from society. The facts surrounding the events are hazy, and the story itself has the characteristics of folklore. As time progresses, more of Knight's story will be revealed. In the meantime, people will continue to speculate about who the North Pond Hermit really is, as he tries to answer that question himself.

Word count: 1,028

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Problem-Solution Essay

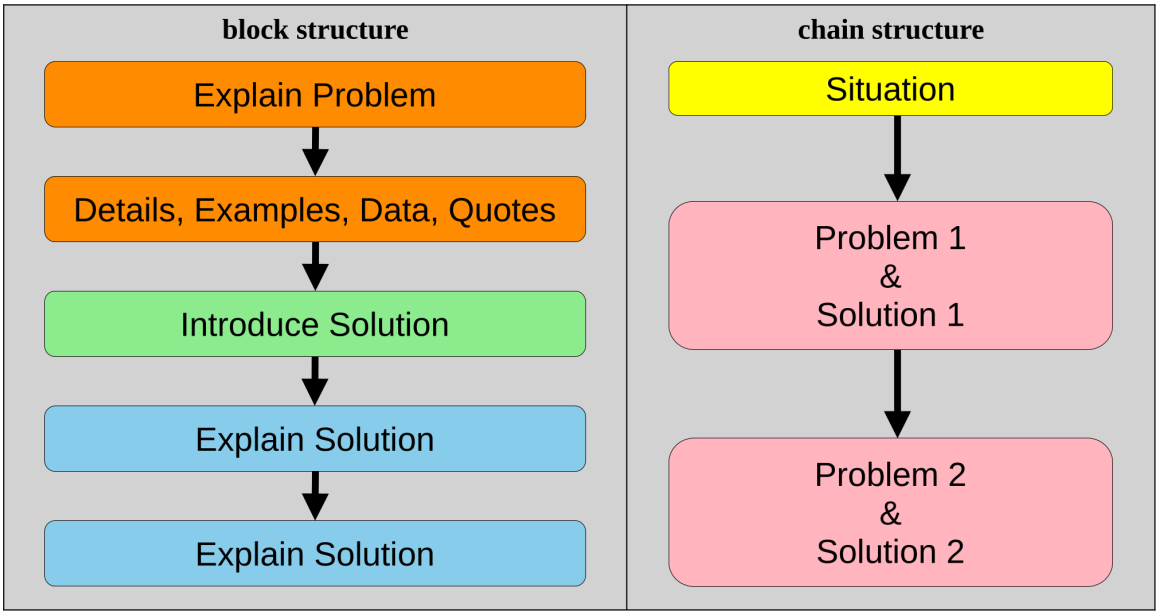
This essay is one where the writer describes a problem and a solution. The size of the problem and solution could be global, local, or even individual in nature. Here are some common essay prompts.

1. How can companies reduce or manage plastic waste?
2. How can schools reduce bullying?
3. What can be done to address the obesity epidemic?
4. What drug rehabilitation strategies are sustainable and effective?
5. Is it possible to attract more women to STEM study?
6. Is there anything to be done about teacher burnout?

These types of questions are common on tests such as the TOEFL and IELTS, and they lend themselves well to timed essay tests, so it's quite possible you already have experience with this essay format.

Techniques

1. **Have an opinion.** Many other types of academic papers de-emphasize the author's opinion, but on this kind of essay, be clear about what you think could be effective.
2. **Research the issue thoroughly.** First, clearly identify the problem, and show that it is a real problem. Second, for many issues it's easy to find one possible cause and then one possible way to address that cause. However, the reader might not be convinced that the cause you found was the primary one, or that your solution will be effective. If you cite multiple sources, your essay will be more convincing. See *Synthesizing* below.
3. **Provide evidence.** Give evidence-based reasons why your solution is likely to be effective or use logical reasoning to support your proposal.
4. **Consider practicality.** Complex problems can be addressed in many ways. Some solutions are simpler, cheaper, and more effective than others. Explain what makes yours a reasonable choice. Depending on the essay length, you could explain what makes other potential solutions less desirable.
5. **Explain how certain you are.** If your solution is a partial (and not complete) solution, say that. If it's a potential (and not guaranteed) solution, say that.
6. **There are several common structures.** Information can reasonably be organized into a block structure or a chain structure.



Synthesizing

In writing, the term **synthesizing** means to put information from multiple sources together to create or support an idea. For longer papers or controversial topics, this is a fundamental writing skill, first because it strengthens your arguments, and second because it adds depth to your coverage of the issue. There are several ways to synthesize sources:

- Use two sources to make the same claim.
  Over the past decade, an increase in bicycle accidents with large trucks and SUVs has been reported across Canada (Smith, 2021; Young, 2024).
- Use the first source to make a general claim and the second source to add more information.
  Johnson (2000) warned about the dangers that pickup trucks would create for those on foot and bicycle. In fact, Tanaka (2015) found that such vehicles are five times more deadly to pedestrians than regular-size cars.
- Show a contrast between two sources.
  According to Zhang (2018), large vehicles pose a grave safety risk to children, because children are so short that drivers cannot easily see where they are. On the other hand, Peterson (2021) has noted that many modern vehicles are now equipped with drive cameras to cover their blind spots.

Summarizing and paraphrasing are ways of expressing ideas taken from outside sources, and synthesizing is a step beyond that. When you're synthesizing, you're taking those sources and using them to build a stronger position or express a new idea.

Example Essays

1. From Model To Mediocre: The Fall of Finland's Education System
2. Tackling Core Beliefs: Promoting Gender Equality in STEM
3. DEI Initiatives in US Corporate Sectors: Solution for Unity or Cause of Division?
4. The Dangers Behind a Delicious Dinner; Reducing Salt for a Healthier Life

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Problem-Solution Essay 1

From Model To Mediocre: The Fall of Finland's Education System

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22 January 2024

Once celebrated for being a global benchmark for education, Finland has witnessed a steady decline in its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings in the past decade (Karvala, 2023). The country's reputation for fostering creativity, equity, academic excellence, and various innovative teaching methods is now under scrutiny as other nations with more strict and disciplined traditional studying cultures surpass its performance. A particularly concerning factor in this decline is the growing achievement gap between native Finnish students and immigrants, which is now among the largest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, with first-generation immigrants scoring 16% worse on average compared to native Finnish students. In a country where the birth rate is decreasing and the immigrant population is increasing, it is vital to tackle this issue for the sake of the country's future. Addressing the linguistic, socioeconomic, and systemic challenges faced by immigrant students is essential for reducing educational disparities and enhancing the overall quality of Finland's education system.

One of the key reasons for the widening gap between native Finnish students and immigrants lies in language proficiency. Finnish is very unknown and scarcely spoken, with limited language learning resources especially for non-Europeans. This limited access to high-quality language instruction is a significant barrier to the success of immigrants. While Finland offers programs aimed at language acquisition, these resources are often insufficient to meet the needs of students who arrive with no prior knowledge of the language. Additionally, time allocated to language learning is often not enough for students to achieve fluency, particularly when they are expected to simultaneously advance through a curriculum taught in Finnish. This linguistic disadvantage not only hinders academic performance but also affects students' confidence, participation in classroom discussions, and ability to form social connections with their peers, further widening the gap between immigrants and Finnish students.

The challenges to the education system are further amplified by the uneven distribution of immigrant students across schools, with research showing that 90% of Finnish schools have little to no immigrant students, while a small percentage have student bodies composed of over 50% immigrants (Ali-Hokka et al., 2015). In urban areas, particularly in Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo, and Turku, these schools with a high concentration of immigrant students often face greater difficulties in maintaining the same level of academic performance as those with more homogeneous student populations. This problem is exacerbated when immigrants from poorer countries concentrate into low-income areas within the cities of Finland, creating a vicious cycle: schools with large numbers of immigrant students in already poor areas may be perceived as underperforming, deterring native Finnish families from enrolling their children. Over time, this dynamic reinforces educational inequities and further isolates immigrant students.

The key in tackling the disparities between immigrants and Finnish students is to focus on fostering equity, rather than equality. Finland is a country where the education system is built around giving all students an equal footing regardless of their socioeconomic status. With education fully funded by taxes from primary school through university, Finland has a long-standing tradition of providing equally high-quality education across

all schools. Yet, schools lack the resources and know-how to appropriately deal with cases where a majority of immigrants gather only into a fraction of schools. While the problem is very complex, the solution should be relatively simple. These immigrant-heavy schools should receive extra funding to hire specialized teachers, teaching assistants, and counselors trained in working in multicultural and multilingual education environments.

To address the linguistic barriers faced by immigrant students, Finland must provide intensive language instruction. Increasing the availability of high-quality Finnish language programs, both within schools and in extracurricular activities, is essential. These programs should start as early as possible and be designed to accelerate language acquisition for first-generation immigrant students who struggle with the challenge of mastering a second language while simultaneously keeping up with other academic subjects. Moreover, encouraging students to actively engage with Finnish in both their academic and daily lives is crucial for developing language proficiency and bridging the cultural gap between native Finns and immigrants.

Restoring Finland's educational excellence requires a commitment to equity that embraces the country's growing diversity. While the widening achievement gap between native Finnish students and immigrants is a significant factor in the country's declining PISA rankings, it is not the only reason. Broader challenges, such as changes in teaching practices, evolving societal attitudes toward education, and shifting global benchmarks, also contribute to this trend. However, by addressing the linguistic, socioeconomic, and systemic obstacles faced by immigrant students, Finland can take a vital step toward reducing disparities and strengthening its educational system as a whole. Tailored language instruction, targeted school funding, and initiatives to foster inclusion will not only benefit immigrant students but also reinforce the principles of equity and innovation that have long defined Finland's approach to education. In tackling these challenges, Finland has the opportunity to adapt and thrive in an increasingly diverse world and to set a new standard for excellence in multicultural education.

Word count: 850

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Problem-Solution Essay 2

Tackling Core Beliefs: Promoting Gender Equality in STEM

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February 5th, 2025

Japan's education system is regarded as one of the most gender-equal aspects of life in the country. According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report, Japan ranks 121st among 153 countries overall, but its education system is significantly higher at 91st place (Zahidi & Eda, 2020). This difference between the two rankings suggests that from a global perspective, Japan's education system is relatively free from discrimination. However, these global benchmarks fail to consider Japan's traditional mindset, which continues to favor male students, particularly in the STEM fields.

The gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), generally considered as "the underrepresentation of women in the … [STEM] fields" (Piloto, 2023), remains a pressing issue globally, particularly in Japan. In Japan, women make up only 16% of the STEM workforce (Zahidi & Eda, 2020) and students (Katsumura, 2023). This is particularly striking, in consideration of the fact that female Japanese high school students rank second in the world in mathematics and third in science (Katsumura, 2023). Given the aforementioned problems, the necessity to create an environment where both genders can thrive in STEM fields is clear.

Problem

To address the gender gap in STEM, it is essential to understand its root cause. An article in the Asia Pacific Business Review suggests three types of prejudice—family, school, and overall society—that significantly influence the gender gap in STEM in Japan (Yokoyama et al., 2024). After examining high school students and their mothers, researchers discovered that factors such as parental educational backgrounds and household income had a statistically meaningful impact on students' interest in pursuing careers in STEM (Yokoyama et al., 2024). Furthermore, the study found that teachers were more likely to recommend physics over biology when students had male names (Yokoyama et al., 2024). Additionally, the study highlighted a strong cultural attitude in Japan that undervalued intelligent women and foundational beliefs that "women had less mathematical ability than men" (Yokoyama et al., 2024). This evidence suggests that to close the gender gap in STEM, it is essential to resolve these stereotypes.

Solution

To overhaul the traditional mindset, the underlying cause of the gender gap in STEM, some form of change is necessary. However, this is extremely difficult as our beliefs come from a "cumulative product of millennia of human culture" (Lewis, 2018). As a result, it is nearly impossible to change these preconceptions simply by telling everyone to do so. According to Dibdin & Wade (2022), to change someone's core beliefs, one must first acknowledge that they exist and then accept that life would be different without that core belief. Therefore, this paper will also follow a similar approach.

In order to change the general public's biases, it is essential to first recognize the underlying core beliefs that contribute to prejudice against women in STEM and other fields. A straightforward approach to achieving this is by highlighting the gender

inequality that, although prevalent, often remains concealed in various aspects of life. This can be accomplished by creating a platform using data to uncover the hidden gender inequality in Japan.

In the last few decades, data has become widely accessible to the general public, empowering individuals to have all the information they require to confront their preconceptions. Many people unconsciously hold beliefs about gender, but data makes that bias visible, making it more difficult to ignore. By utilizing existing data and conducting more surveys across schools, companies, and other institutions, the platform can provide the general public insights into the extent of gender inequality in everyday life. This increased awareness can lead more people to recognize and understand their biases against women more clearly.

From this understanding of the prevalence of gender inequality, the next step is to show how much these beliefs restrict people's lives and encourage people to accept them. One method to accomplish this is by demonstrating how countries that achieve gender equality in STEM tend to be more affluent. For example, statistics from the International Monetary Fund indicate that reducing the gender gap in countries can boost the gross domestic product (GDP) by 23% (Calviño, 2024). Presenting this kind of data can motivate society to accept that gender equality benefits not only women but everyone.

By following this data-driven approach, people can learn to understand that achieving gender equality will lead to a better future for everyone. Although gender equality in general may seem different from gender equality in STEM, both issues share the same root cause. Therefore, the solutions for one issue can effectively address the other as well.

Conclusion

Gender inequality in STEM and other aspects of life is not only ethically wrong but also significantly impacts our quality of life. While Japan has made progress toward gender equality compared to other countries, students, parents, educators, and the general public need to recognize the current situation and work together to improve it for future generations.

Word count: 822

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Problem-Solution Essay 3

DEI Initiatives in US Corporate Sectors: Solution for Unity or Cause of Division?

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Central High School
January 30th, 2025

Gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, and religion. There are numerous factors that historically divided societies and led to discrimination. However, in recent decades, movements advocating for equal rights and opportunities have led to significant societal changes, encouraging people to make a diverse, open society for everyone, regardless of their differences. Many companies have responded to this by implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives to create fairer workplaces.

The United States played a leading role in introducing DEI initiatives in the corporate sector. According to ABC News (2025), DEI policies aim to "correct discriminatory practices" by hiring people from various backgrounds (*diversity*), conducting fair payment, treatment, and opportunities (*equity*), and valuing one's ideas and perspectives (*inclusion*). Since the 2010s, major U.S. companies have promoted diversity in hiring, equal pay, and inclusive work cultures, leading companies in other countries.

However, DEI efforts in the U.S. are now facing backlash. Critics argue that some companies prioritize hiring quotas over real inclusion (i.e., *tokenism*), while others believe DEI gives unfair advantages to certain groups (i.e., *reverse discrimination*). This essay will explore these two major challenges and propose three solutions to improve corporate DEI: gathering employee feedback, setting both short- and long-term goals, and improving communication.

The first major problem is tokenism, where companies hire diverse employees to appeal to the public but fail to provide real inclusion. Hiring diverse employees is not enough; without fair promotions, mentorship, and leadership opportunities, these employees may feel isolated and undervalued. For example, many companies have increased hiring of women and minority employees, but their turnover rate remains disproportionately high. According to a study from Harvard Kennedy School, "Black employees are 6.7 percentage points more likely to turnover within two years [compared to white employees], [and] the largest turnover gap is between Black and White women, at 8.9 percentage points" (Linos, 2024). This is often due to the lack of career development opportunities or company cultures that fail to integrate diverse perspectives. Tokenism makes DEI initiatives appear superficial rather than meaningful, ultimately damaging workplace morale and trust.

The second major problem is the perceptions of reverse discrimination, where some employees believe DEI policies unfairly prioritize diversity over merit. This perception often occurs when companies set strict diversity quotas or appear to favor certain groups in hiring and promotion decisions. Several lawsuits have emerged from employees who felt hiring decisions were based on identity rather than the individual's skill, such as the Herrera vs. NYC Department of Education, where Lois Herrera, who was working in the NYC Department of Education, claimed that she was "replaced by a less qualified Black man" (Edelman, 2024). Whether these claims are valid or not, the perception of unfairness often creates workplace tension and rejection, reducing cooperation and team unity.

In order to overcome these problems and improve corporate DEI initiatives, the following paragraphs will propose three step solutions. The first step is to gather feedback from employees to improve DEI initiatives. Many DEI initiatives are designed by executives without input from employees, leading to initiatives that do not reflect actual workplace needs. If companies fail to address the actual experiences of minority employees, tokenism can persist. Meanwhile, if non-minority employees feel their concerns are ignored, perceptions of reverse discrimination can grow. To address these issues, companies should:

- Conduct anonymous surveys to measure employee experiences with DEI initiatives.
- Establish advisory groups representing both minority and non-minority employees to discuss workplace inclusion.
- Train managers to gather feedback from teams and implement necessary changes.

By gathering employee feedback, companies can make DEI initiatives more fair and effective, reducing both tokenism and reverse discrimination concerns.

The second step will be setting both short-term and long-term goals for DEI initiatives. Many DEI initiatives focus only on short-term hiring quotas, which can unintentionally reinforce tokenism by prioritizing diversity numbers over real change. To build sustainable workplace inclusion, companies must implement long-term strategies such as:

- Mentorship programs: Pair minority employees with experienced leaders to provide career guidance.
- Leadership training: Develop diverse talent into future managers and executives.
- Regular progress assessments: Evaluate retention rates, employee satisfaction, and promotion trends.

These long-term strategies will shift DEI initiatives from a short-term public relations effort to a lasting cultural transformation, solving tokenism.

The third solution will be encouraging open communication. Many companies often fail to clearly explain the entire picture of DEI initiatives, leading to confusion and skepticism, and it is essential for non-minority employees to understand the DEI initiatives. To build trust and transparency, companies should:

- Hold open forums where employees can ask questions and discuss their concerns.
- Publish clear DEI progress reports outlining the hiring trends, promotions, and salary equity.
- Ensure managers communicate DEI goals effectively to all employees.

These policies ensure all employees understand DEI goals, which will allow companies to move beyond superficial diversity efforts, solving the issue of tokenism. The policies will also help employees accept DEI initiatives and make everyone feel included, minimizing the perception of reverse discrimination.

While DEI initiatives are essential for creating fair workplaces, their effectiveness is threatened by tokenism and reverse discrimination. Companies must gather employee feedback to refine DEI strategies, set both short- and long-term goals for sustainable effects, and improve communication to build workplace trust in order to make a society open for everyone.

Word count: 901

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Problem-Solution Essay 4

The Dangers Behind a Delicious Dinner; Reducing Salt for a Healthier Life

Zoe Robinson
Central High School
February 5, 2025

Salt is indispensable for the taste of meals and is included in all forms of food. Even food that does not taste of salt, such as white bread, contains it to some extent, making it easy to take too much without knowing it. The overconsumption of salt among Japanese people has been a significant problem for decades in Japan. While Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (2019) recommends less than 7.5 grams of salt per day for men and less than 6.5 grams of salt per day for women, the average salt intake of Japanese men and women per day in 2023 was 10.7 grams and 9.1 grams, respectively (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2024). Moreover, the World Health Organization (2023) sets even stricter goals, suggesting "a salt intake of less than 5 grams" per person daily. This is less than a typical Japanese dinner meal—salted salmon, *kinpira* burdock, miso soup, pickled plums, and rice—which contains 5-6 grams of salt in total (The Nisshin OilliO Group, Ltd., 2023).

The excessive intake of salt is a critical issue, as it is detrimental for people's health. Salt is mainly composed of sodium, which is a substance strongly associated with hypertension. According to Action on Salt (n.d.), "[A] high salt diet disrupts the natural sodium balance in the body. This causes the body to retain water, which increases the pressure of the pushing of blood against the vessel walls." Hypertension is deleterious to people's bodies and has the possibility of leading to arteriosclerosis, heart attacks, heart disease, strokes, etc. (Alabama Department of Public Health, 2021). These symptoms have the potential to be fatal, and some are in fact the leading factors of death in Japan (Statista, 2024).

A large proportion of people who overconsume salt are unaware of how much salt they eat and do not consider the problem as serious as it actually is (Schutte & Neal, 2024). Therefore, the first step that should be taken is to disseminate information about salt, including the average intake, the salt content in products, and its dangers to health. To accomplish this, the government should make elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools give lessons about it in health education classes. Furthermore, it will be vital to continuously give those lectures to make students commit the content to memory, since most people's minds are incapable of remembering something they learned once.

Another measure the government can take is to legislate the amount of salt companies can use per portion. There are a considerable number of restaurants that serve meals with harmful amounts of salt. For example, at Ootoya, a popular Japanese chain restaurant, the "*karaage* with sweet and spicy sauce" meal consists of 6.7 grams of salt (Ootoya, n.d.), which is more than the ideal daily salt intake for women. Forcing companies to use less salt will likely help reduce salt intake among Japanese people since many people often eat meals at restaurants.

Restricting companies' use of salt and disseminating information about salt both encourage people to consume it in a healthier way. However, these do not solve the problem at a fundamental level, and in order to do so, it is essential for individuals to make an effort as well. One effective step is to keep away from eating processed food, such as sausages, cup noodles, already-made meals, and supermarket bread. Moreover, avoiding going to restaurants, using less salt and seasoning when cooking, and checking

the nutrition label when buying food are beneficial. Although it would be ideal if people could adhere to this low-sodium diet, the reality is that it is difficult for many people to do so because the taste of it is often bland and boring. It could be unbearable for some, because most people are attuned to salty tastes. The one fact unknown to most people who never start a low-sodium diet or quit it in an early stage for this reason is that their tongues are likely to gradually adapt to the reduced-salt meals. Several studies suggest that restricting salt for 4 weeks to 5 months will help people's tongues adapt to low-sodium food, enabling them to enjoy those foods more than before (Engelman, 1982; European Society of Cardiology, 2022; Cattaneo et al., 2023). Although the preference towards salty food will remain, the cravings towards it will be relieved, and it will be easier to maintain a healthy diet (European Society of Cardiology, 2022). It is true that the first few weeks will presumably be stressful. However, since it is likely that the stress will diminish over time, it is strongly recommended to stick to a reduced-salt diet for a few weeks as a start.

The overconsumption of salt among Japanese people is a grave problem, as it has a high risk of leading to health issues. To encourage people to take less salt, the government should require schools to regularly give lectures about salt and restrict the amount of salt companies can use. However, completely relying on government efforts is insufficient, and individuals should do their utmost to stick to a low-sodium diet as well. Since having an appropriate relationship with salt is inevitable to live a healthy life, immediate actions must be taken to solve this problem.

Word count: 899

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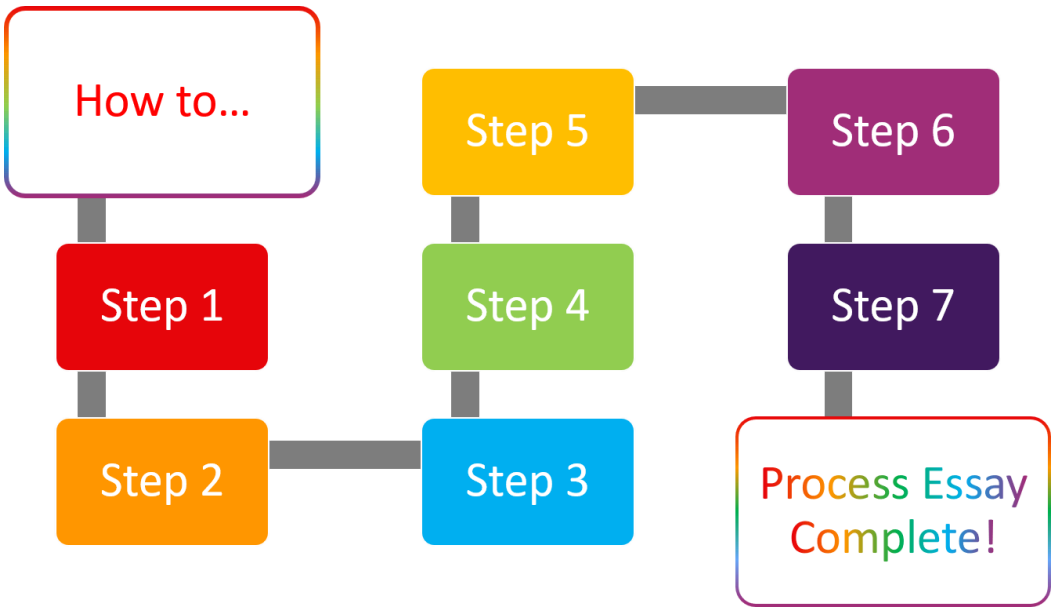
Process Essay

The **process essay** guides readers through the stages of completing a task successfully. It is certainly among the most common forms of written discourse. Think of the number of self-help books, cookbooks, textbooks, and guidebooks for doing nearly every activity you can think of. In school subjects, the process essay is also a common assignment. Explain how a bill becomes a law; how do you determine the theme of a poem; how do trees produce oxygen; how does company X market its product; how does a hydroelectric dam produce electricity; how do you serve a tennis ball?

The template for a process essay is usually straightforward. The introductory paragraph provides some context and presents the thesis. After that comes a series of body paragraphs, each one explaining a step in the process. The conclusion confirms the usefulness of the process that has been provided.



Techniques

1. **Determine the target audience.** Who is the target reader? Check the assignment instructions about who your explanations are supposed to target. Typical targets include classmates or the instructor, but it's possible you could be focusing on another group of people. If you're writing about how to use a cellphone app, for example, the instructions you'd give to your friends are probably quite different than those you'd give to your friends' grandparents.
2. **Plan.** Decide if you want to follow chronological order, address the simple to the complex, or proceed from the known to the unknown.
3. **Create a list of directions.** You're telling your reader how to do something. Provide a path to the goal.
4. **Include everything important.** Take some time away from your list of steps and revisit it with fresh eyes to be sure that you didn't miss anything significant. You already know how to do the thing you're explaining, but the reader knows much less. So you want to be thorough. At the same time, if you include too much information, the reader will get bored, and you'll exceed the word limit.
5. **Don't confuse your reader.** Don't include unnecessary information. Never backtrack, because this will frustrate your reader.

6. **Keep the reader interested.** You're writing an essay, not a manual. Show some personality and catch your reader's interest.

Example Essays

1. How to Properly Cleanse Your Face
2. How to Treat a Common Cold

References

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Process Essay 1

How to Properly Cleanse Your Face

Jenna Hudson (Adapted)
Excelsior University
August 3, 2022

The how and why of many daily tasks seem obvious. For example, most individuals over the age of seven do not need to be told how to pour a bowl of cereal and milk for breakfast. However, other seemingly simple tasks actually require some technique and precision to be done in the most effective manner. The act of facial cleansing is one of latter tasks, slightly more complex than it first appears. This daily process is important because the skin is a delicate organ, easily damaged and rather challenging to repair. A number of cleansing steps, some required and some optional, can help care for skin. These steps are removing makeup, cleansing, treating, moisturizing, and protecting with SPF.

The first step in effective facial cleansing is to remove any makeup. This step can be done with a pre-moistened wipe, a liquid remover, or a natural oil, such as jojoba. To loosen eye makeup, gently hold the wipe or a cotton ball saturated in the preferred agent on the eye area for up to a minute. Then, remove the makeup by wiping in short downward motions. The eye area is very delicate, so it is important to be gentle.

Next, lay a wash cloth soaked in warm water over the face for one to three minutes. This action opens the pores and makes the subsequent steps more effective. Alternatively, steam from a warm shower will do the same job. After the pores are open, splash the face with warm water rather than hot, as hot water can damage the skin cells and capillaries. Apply a dime-sized dollop of skin-type-specific cleanser to the forehead, nose, chin, neck, and chest. Some products require emulsification prior to being applied to the face. For about three minutes, blend the cleanser into the skin with a combination of gentle circular motions and light pressure. Finally, rinse the cleanser off with warm water.

The next step, exfoliation, is an optional step, and many individuals choose to do it once or twice a week with either a chemical exfoliant, such as AHA or glycolic acid, or microbeads. Some aestheticians warn against using an exfoliant with irregular granules, such as apricot kernels, as they may cause micro-abrasions on the face. In the event that the exfoliant of choice is built into a cleanser, simply swap it for the regular cleanser several days a week. Otherwise, apply the exfoliating product to the face after cleanser, gently massage it in, and then rinse it off. Follow cleansing or exfoliating with a splash of cool water to calm the skin and close the pores back up. Pat any excess moisture off the face with a soft towel.

The treating and moisturizing steps that follow cleansing are just as important to the skin as the actual application of cleanser. After toweling off, apply any skin-specific serums or ointments. This step is another extra, but it can be useful for treating specific conditions, such as oiliness, acne, dryness, or age-related concerns. Some examples are salicylic acid for acne, a toner for oily skin, retinol for wrinkles, or antioxidants for overall skin health. Allow the skin to absorb the serum or ointment for one to three minutes, and then apply dime-sized dots of moisturizer, whichever variety is best for the individual skin type (oil-free, extra moisture, etc.), to the forehead, nose, chin, neck, and chest. Rub in the moisturizer. For daytime, follow the moisturizer with sunscreen on the face, ears, neck, and chest. Sunscreen is an important step all year round, as damage to the skin can occur in a small amount of time with relatively little sun exposure. Allow the moisturizer and

sunscreen to absorb for at least three minutes. Finally, blot the face to absorb any residual product or oil before leaving the house or applying makeup.

The steps we take to care for our skin can make a difference for an important part of our bodies. Following these steps leaves the skin properly cleansed, conditioned, and protected. Healthy skin is one key aspect in our overall health.

Word count: 689

Process Essay 2

How to Treat a Common Cold

James Sexton & Derek Soles
Composition and Literature
August 28, 2019

From that first itch in your nose to your final cough, a cold generally lasts from seven to ten days (Newman, n.d.). Though researchers have yet to find a cure for these common but pesky viruses, some home treatments can provide relief from a cold's most unpleasant symptoms.

During the first couple days of a cold, no symptoms will alert you that you've been infected, but by day three, you'll start to sneeze, your body may ache, and you'll likely have a tickle or soreness in your throat (Jones, 2018). Next, you'll feel congestion in your sinuses; your nose will run and, due to inflammation around the airways, you may develop a cough that can persist after your other symptoms are long gone (Jones, 2018). Fortunately, two weeks after the infection, you will produce antibodies that prevent you from catching that particular cold virus again. Unfortunately, there exist around another 199 strains of cold virus, so you can easily pick up another one (Jones, 2018)!

Purported cold remedies are almost as common as the cold virus itself; some might even help ease your symptoms. Staying hydrated with water, clear broth or tea can loosen congestion; a saltwater gargle made with ½ teaspoon of salt in eight ounces of water can relieve a sore throat (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2018). Over-the-counter saline nasal drops can relieve stuffiness, and pain relievers such as acetaminophen and ibuprofen can help with aches and fever, as long as you follow the recommended dosage. Some cold remedies contain multiple ingredients, such as a decongestant plus a pain reliever, so make sure you're not taking too much of any medication and remember: medication will not shorten a cold's duration (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2018).

The list of cold remedies with conflicting evidence is long! Taking vitamin C before the onset of cold symptoms may shorten the duration of symptoms, but it appears that, for the most part, taking vitamin C won't help the average person prevent colds (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2018). Study results on whether echinacea prevents or shortens colds are also mixed. Some studies show no benefit, but others show some reduction in the severity and duration of cold symptoms when taken in the early stages of a cold. Different types of echinacea used in different studies may have contributed to the differing results (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2018).

There has been a lot of talk about taking zinc for colds ever since a 1984 study showed that zinc supplements reduced the severity of colds (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2018). Since then, other studies have shown that zinc lozenges or syrup reduce the length of a cold by one day, especially when taken within 24 hours of the first signs and symptoms of a cold. Both echinacea and zinc have potentially harmful side effects. Talk to your doctor before considering the use of zinc to prevent or reduce the length of colds.

Evidently, the common cold defies medical science; it eludes both our immune systems and the pharmaceutical industry. Colds are most often caused by rhinoviruses, a large family of viruses with hundreds of variants. This makes vaccination impossible and gives our immune system a challenging task. Additionally, these viruses evolve rapidly, so even if we could produce vaccines to cover the full spectrum of rhinoviruses, they would

quickly become resistant (Newman, n.d.). However, according to a new study, help may soon be at hand.

Professor Ed Tate of Imperial College London in the United Kingdom and his team of scientists are taking a new approach. They have been looking for a compound to combat malaria and have found two molecules that become effective when combined. Using advanced techniques, they used these two molecules to produce a new compound that blocks an enzyme called N-myristoyltransferase (NMT), which is found in human cells. Viruses normally steal NMT from human cells and use it to create a protective shell; NMT is vital for the survival of cold viruses. All strains of the common cold virus use this technique, so inhibiting NMT would cure all strains of common cold virus. The researchers have high hopes for the drug, but much more research will be needed to confirm its efficacy and safety (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2018).

Until then, it may be tempting to try the latest internet-approved remedy, but the best thing to do is take care of yourself. Rest, drink fluids, and try to wait patiently for your cold's demise.

Word count: 754

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Fiction

Here are a few techniques and considerations useful for fiction writing. Many of these can also be used in nonfiction academic writing. However, academic writing tends to have stricter rules about proper expression. Because fiction writing is more flexible in nature, it's a good place to learn about and try new styles and techniques.

When you're struggling to get started with fiction writing, read more short stories. Look for authors who have nice writing styles. Learn about some common tropes. Examine some ways of playing with perspective or time. Along with reading, brainstorming is a great tool. When you're making a choice about where the plot should go next, try to think of several ideas. Although you might only use one idea in the particular story you're writing at this exact moment, keep the others in the back your mind, and you can use some of them in the future.

If you're just getting started with fiction writing, you might enjoy microfiction.

Literary Techniques

- Alliteration – repeated leading letters leads readers to look at it
- Dialogue – formatting guidelines for speech and thought
- Pace – find ways to play with time that keep the reader interested
- Parallelism – repeated grammatical patterns can be artistic and engaging
- Point of View – the narration perspective
- Tense – most stories are in past or present tense
- Theme – what you say when someone asks what your story is about

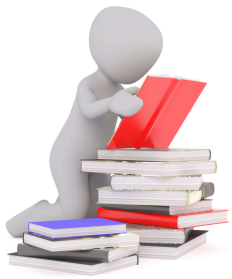
Write Fiction by Writing Nonfiction

One tactic for writing fiction is to write nonfiction. If you experienced something yourself, or you were there and saw it happen, take advantage of your memory. When you're writing, reuse that scene from your life. Change the characters and some details, but leave many of the original aspects just as they were. Your description of the scene will sound real because it is.

A related tactic is to use actual facts about the world from the past or present. If the main character goes to a restaurant in Paris, for example, why not find a real Parisian restaurant's website? You can see what decor looks like, find out what's on the menu, and even mention the nearest subway station.

Short Stories

Here are some famous short stories that might be of interest. There are countless short stories you might want to read, depending on your interests. These were selected because they're famous, very short, are great examples of writing techniques or styles. They're also in the Public Domain.



- Kate Chopin – The Blind Man (1897)
- Kate Chopin – The Story of an Hour (1894)
- Roald Dahl – Lamb to the Slaughter (1953)

- Philip K. Dick – The Eyes Have It (1953)
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman – An Extinct Angel (1891)
- Ernest Hemingway – Hills Like White Elephants (1927)
- Ernest Hemingway – Soldier's Home (1925)
- O. Henry – A Strange Story (1881)
- O. Henry – After Twenty Years (1906)
- O. Henry – The Gift of the Magi (1905)
- O. Henry – The Last Leaf (1907)
- Leo Tolstoy – How Much Land Does a Man Need? (1886)
- Kurt Vonnegut – 2BR02B (1962)

More Short Stories

Here are some other notable short stories.

- Ray Bradbury – All Summer in a Day (1954)
- Ernest Hemingway – Old Man at the Bridge (1938)
- Ursula K. Le Guin – The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas (1973)
- Paul Milenski – Tickits (1985)

Microfiction

Microfiction is a category of very short fiction. There are many different types.

- **Six-word Story**
- **55 Fiction** (55-word story)
- **Drabble** (100-word story)
- **Twitterature** (280-character story)

Six-word Story

> For sale: baby shoes, never worn

The above is the most famous six-word story. Some people say that it was written by Ernest Hemingway, but he never claimed so, and the story predates him. What is the plot of the story? Because someone is selling baby shoes that haven't been used, we understand that they were expecting to have a child, went shopping, and some kind of tragedy struck. Now they're selling off the things they no longer need. All of that is expressed in a mere six words.

Here are some other examples.

- Honey, which one is the brake?
- Hey! No smoking at the gas –
- You finally apologized, through iron bars.
- "Damned Nazi." "No, idiot, cancer." "Sorry."
- Traffic jam. Ambulance delayed. Departed silently.

55 Fiction

The rules are as follows:

1. 55 words
2. some setting
3. 1+ characters
4. conflict & resolution
5. the title doesn't count
6. the title is 7 words or less

One long-running annual contest is held by the New Times SLO. Look at current or past selections for inspiration.

> **Minecraft**
>
> I went to the store, bought Minecraft, and headed home.
>
> I stole some money from an old man and ran from a pack of wolves. I killed a few sheep that got in my way. I burned a village and smiled as the smoke

drifted into the sky.

Eventually I got home. And installed Minecraft.

DP & YT (2024)

Childhood Friend

After school I walk home with my best friend. I've been in love with him since we were seven, but he only sees me as a friend.

"I have a crush on someone," he says.

"Oh." I look down. It hurts too much to hear.

"I'm thinking of telling them soon."

"When?"

"Right about now."

DP (2025)

The Case of an Itchy Summer

Today I committed murder.

What else could I have done? He was the one who came at me with the sharp end pointed toward my body. There was no choice. I had to defend myself with all my power.

Now look at my hand. It's completely smeared with blood... Oh no, looks like it's mine.

RO (2024)

Ending a Life

Sam has been dissatisfied with his life. He hated school because it was boring and also despised his parents since they were strict with him. He was very stressed out. He bought a rope and made a knot to end his life, which he hated. Sam is ready to move out and become a cowboy.

RH (2024)

Sand and Foam

Once I said to a poet, "We shall not know your worth until you die."

And he answered saying, "Yes, death is always the revealer. And if indeed you would know my worth it is that I have more in my heart than upon my tongue, and more in my desire than in my hand."

Kahlil Gibran (1926)

Drabble

A drabble is a 100-word story. Here are a few examples.

The Love of My Life

Carmen lives in the apartment downstairs, and I fell in love with her the second I saw her. We started dating a month ago, and I thought everything was going great, but there's a disaster. It seems she has another man. His name is Frank.

She goes on long walks with Frank every day, and Saturday morning I saw them cuddling together on the bench outside. My heart aches in pain, but still I love her.

"Carmen, this two-timing is killing me. Who do you want more? Me or Frank?"

"Oh dear, don't be so jealous. He's just a dog."

DP (2025)

Rubble

Look! Some time ago there was an elementary school here.

They built it a hundred years ago. Kids studied in the classrooms, and in the winter the snow would slide off the roof and form a giant mountain in the courtyard where, during break time, the fifth graders played King of the Hill until the lunch bell rang.

Now it's just a gravel pit. The population declined, they said. It wasn't economical, they said. But I remember the people and the place as it once was, the heart of the village.

Can you imagine it? Don't you sigh. Please, try.

DP (2025)

A Possessive Journey

Knees hurt, toes blistered. We're thirsty and sunburned. We ran out of food hours ago. Here we are, miles from nowhere. Somehow David agreed to the walk, a grueling 2000-foot ascent up Sentinel Pass. Why go there? Why not. Reasons don't matter.

The crowd down by the lake will never understand. They'll never experience this splendor, the scenery, the way that, right in the middle of the cliff, a glacier turns into a waterfall. Perfection.

You know what? Good. This place is for wanderers. David and I walk down, joints aching, knowing that it's ours, it all belongs to us.

DP (2025)

Blue Carnation

A woman walked into a flower shop. She had beige hair and pale blue eyes.

"Hi. May I help you?" the clerk asked her.

"Good afternoon. Do you have any blue flowers here?" she inquired, holding her chest.

“Here they are. As a gift to someone?”

“Yes. For my precious. It is her birthday today.” A pink and gold locket on her chest glowed gently, reflecting the afternoon sunlight.

“Have a nice day!”

“You too.”

After she got home, she put some blue carnations into a vase.

“Happy birthday, Amelia.”

She smiled at her final photo on the household altar.

SY (2025)

Microfiction Writing Tips

1. Show the setting in the first sentence.
2. Use contractions. The phrase “do not” is two words, whereas “don’t” is only one word.
3. Don’t write out numbers. As written, “two hundred and one” is four words, whereas “201” is only one word.
4. Write first, edit later. If you sit down and write a story draft that’s 93 words long, add a few words to create a Drabble. Or, if it’s 62 words long, cut it down to 55 Fiction.
5. Write more. If you’re having trouble writing one good story, try writing ten OK stories and then choose your favorite.
6. Read more. There are thousands of great examples online, and each story takes thirty seconds to read.
7. Many microfiction stories end with a surprising plot twist or punch line, but this is not required. Write the story you want to write.
8. Brainstorm plot ideas with a friend. Sometimes finding an idea is hard, but writing it is easy.

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Alliteration

Alliteration is the term used to describe successive words starting with the same sound, and usually with the same letter. "She sells seashells by the sea shore" is a tongue twister, and it is also an example of alliteration. You've probably encountered many examples of this poetic technique in your day-to-day life. Advertisements, tongue twisters, nursery rhymes, and pop songs use the technique.

Why do writers choose to repeat the first letter of a string of words? What does the technique do? Alliteration may be challenging, humorous, or even ominous. The repeated letters announce themselves visually and aurally, and this draws the reader's attention to those words.

In ordinary fiction writing, and sometimes in non-fiction writing, authors can reasonably use alliteration in small amounts, and it's often used when titling an essay or article. Alliteration is used more heavily in poetry.

Examples

Tongue Twisters

- Six thick thistle sticks.
- He threw three free throws.
- Betty Botter bought some butter.
- She sells seashells by the sea shore.
- A big black bug bit a big black bear.

Products

- Coca-Cola
- Krispy Kreme
- Dunkin' Donuts
- The Buffalo Bills (U.S. football)
- The Pittsburgh Pirates (U.S. baseball)

Poetry

- Edgar Allen Poe: While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping.
- Emily Dickinson: Much madness is divinest sense / to a discerning eye.
- Lord Byron: And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea.
- Ruth Moose: From socks to shirts / the selves we shed.
- Shakespeare: A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life.

References

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Dialogue

Writing dialogue is an important skill for fiction writers. Although finding the best words and phrases can take a long time, the actual formatting conventions are fairly simple. If you've read a few short stories or books, you've seen dialogue in action hundreds of times, and the below information will be a brief reminder of exactly what's being done with the grammar and formatting.

Quotation Marks

Put quotes around the dialogue. Trailing punctuation goes inside the quotes.

He said, "Good morning."

She replied, "Yes, it is a good morning."

"Would you like some coffee?" she asked.

He thought about it and answered, "Yes, please."

Dialogue Tags

The piece before or after the dialogue is called the **dialogue tag**. Generally, the dialogue and tag are separated by a comma. Generally, dialogue should begin with a capital letter. If a conversation goes on for a long time, dialogue tags may not be necessary. If the reader can easily understand who is speaking, omit the tags.

"Good morning," Hermione said.

"What's good about it?" Jamie grumbled.

"Well, look at birds and the roses outside. How beautiful!"

"It's going to rain later."

"Don't be no negative, Jamie."

Here are some common dialogue tags: said, stated, shouted, whispered, yelled, asked, answered, replied.

Paragraphs

When the speaker changes, or when the focus of the action changes, start a new paragraph. If the speaker is also doing something, their speech and action might fit into one paragraph.

It was a dark and stormy night, and the rain pelted the house like it was trying to wash it away. Suddenly, there was a noise at the door.

"What was that?" asked Frank.

Sheila replied in a shaky voice, "I don't know. Should we check?"

Frank got out of bed and rummaged around for his bathrobe. “You stay here. I’ll be right back.” He tiptoed down the hall and creaky stairs, listening carefully for any further strange noise. Five minutes later, he returned.

“It was the cat,” he groaned as he sank into his pillow.

By putting the speaker’s actions and words together in a paragraph, you reduce the total number of paragraphs, which usually makes the passage easier to read.

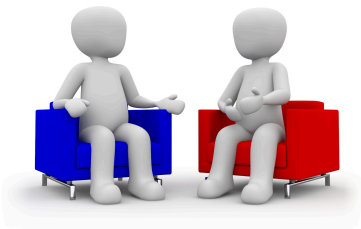
“Did you bring it inside?” she asked.

“Yes, of course.”

“Thank you for checking.”

Detailed Rules

1. Spoken words go in quotation marks.
2. Use dialogue tags much of the time.
3. When you change speakers, start a new paragraph.
4. Use commas with dialogue tags, and use ordinary punctuation with other verbs.
   Leia said, “I love you.”
   Han looked at her and nodded. “I know.”
5. If the dialogue tag comes last, replace the preceding period with a comma.
   “I believe you,” Nancy whispered.
6. If the dialogue tag comes last, leave preceding question marks and exclamation points as they are.
   “Don’t you own a TV?” Justine asked.
   “A TV? Hell no!” Joe replied.
7. Use single quotation marks to quote things inside dialogue.
   Dexter said, “Yeah, it was wild. Then I said, ‘You can keep the duck.’ We all laughed.”
8. Use lowercase when the dialogue tag splits the sentence.
   “If we don’t leave now,” Marcus yelled, “we’ll be late.”
9. Use an em dash to show an interruption.
   “We need to leave before—” A crash downstairs had the sisters running for the fire escape.



Thought

If you want to show what a character is specifically thinking, you can use the above formatting, with quotation marks, and change the tags to be things like “she thought” or “they told themselves”.

> Chewbacca looked at Luke and Leia. He thought to himself, “They look nothing alike. Are they actually related? How unexpected.” He shrugged his shoulders, turned back to the console, and pressed the accelerator.

Some authors prefer to put thoughts in italics.

> Chewbacca looked at Luke and Leia. *They look nothing alike. Are they actually related? How unexpected.* He shrugged his shoulders, turned back to the console, and pressed the accelerator.

The above styles are both widely used. Before using either, though, see if it’s actually necessary. Often, authors are telling a story from a limited perspective, in which case it’s already understood that information is coming from the main character.

> Chewbacca looked at Luke and Leia. The two didn’t resemble each other at all. Was it possible that they were actually siblings? He shrugged his shoulders, turned back to the console, and pressed the accelerator.

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Pace

Pace is an important part of fiction writing, and it's especially important for action and suspense. If each paragraph describes thirty seconds of action, the audience will get bored by the end of the page. It's the writer's job to build interest before something notable happens, or to have the notable action happen suddenly or unexpectedly. In music, there are changes in tempo, dynamics, and feeling through the course of a song, and the same general ideas can be used in fiction, and particularly in storytelling.

Set the Scene: Example 1

Here's an example from the beginning of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter (1902).

Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and their names were—Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter.

They lived with their Mother in a sand-bank, underneath the root of a very big fir tree.

"Now, my dears," said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, "you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden: your Father had an accident there; he was put in a pie by Mrs. McGregor."

This is a children's story, so the introduction is simple: the people, the place, and a preview to the journey that will soon commence.

Set the Scene: Example 2

Here's an example from the beginning of 2BR02B by Kurt Vonnegut (1962).

Everything was perfectly swell.

There were no prisons, no slums, no insane asylums, no cripples, no poverty, no wars.

All diseases were conquered. So was old age.

Death, barring accidents, was an adventure for volunteers.

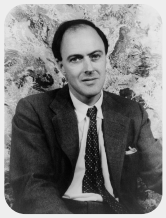
The population of the United States was stabilized at forty-million souls.

One bright morning in the Chicago Lying-in Hospital, a man named Edward K. Wehling, Jr., waited for his wife to give birth. He was the only man waiting. Not many people were born a day any more.

The first five sentences make profound statements about the world, and then the story focuses on one man.

Set the Scene: Example 3

Here's an example from the beginning of *Lamb to the Slaughter* by Roald Dahl (1953).



The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight—hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin—for this was her sixth month with child—had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

The first paragraph describes the environment. The second paragraph mentions the main character. Things get moving at the end of the third paragraph.

What If

One effective way to make your plot exciting is to end a paragraph on an ambiguous sentence, and then in the next paragraph decide what to do by asking the question, *What would completely surprise either the main character or the reader?*

Perhaps your main character walks into a hotel lobby and the elevator dings. What happens next? Ask yourself what the main character couldn't possibly expect. Maybe the elevator doors open and out walks their grandmother, the President, or perhaps their doppelganger. Or maybe the doors don't open at all, and the elevator explodes. There are many ways the story can go at a juncture like this.

What If: The Story of an Hour

Read The Story of an Hour, written by Kate Chopin. If you're in a group or class, read it together with the people around you, pausing to discuss each section as indicated in the text. By the end of it, you should see one way of using time and transitions to add suspense.

What If: 2BR02B

Read 2BR02B, written by Kurt Vonnegut. After you finish, take a look at the last quarter of the story. There are several surprising plot twists and several places where the author could easily have taken the story in a different direction.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is placing tidbits of information early in the story that help the reader anticipate the direction the story might go. Here are several famous examples.

- In *Romeo and Juliet*, before Romeo goes to the party he says, "I fear too early, for my mind misgives some consequence yet hanging in the stars shall bitterly begin his fearful date…" The play has a tragic ending.
- Agatha Christie titled one of her books, "Murder on the Orient Express". The reader is already anticipating murder when they open the front cover.
- Near the beginning of *Charlotte's Web*, the rat finds a rotten egg. The goose tells him, "Be careful—a rotten egg can be a regular stink bomb!" Later in the book, it is used as one.

Foreshadowing can be direct, where the author gives some general information but waits until later to explain the details. Here are some common types of direct foreshadowing.

1. A bad dream.
2. A fortune or prophecy.
3. Thunder, rain, or any kind of bad weather.
4. A vague sentence fragment, such as "… not knowing what had happened at home."

Foreshadowing can be indirect, as well. Here are a few ideas of how.

- The Indiana Jones movies open with the main character trying to attain a valuable artifact and failing, setting up his eventual success at the end of the movie.
- The principle of Chekhov's gun states that if you're going to mention the gun above the fireplace when describing the living room, someone should fire that gun later on.
- A song could be playing on the radio, and the lyrics could allude to future action.

Playing With Time

Two common ways to jump forward or backward in time are flashbacks and dream sequences.

Perhaps the main character is about to give a speech to Congress, and they're nervous about talking in front of a national audience. Why not have a flashback to the day they transferred to a new high school, and they had to introduce themselves to their new classmates? They might recall the advice their teacher gave them, which will serve them well in the present situation, too.

Perhaps the main character is camping near a ruined castle that they're going to explore the following day. Why not have a dream sequence where they dream about walking into the dark basement only to find a sleeping bear, before they wake up drenched in sweat? The next day, when they actually investigate the ruins, they might scream after hearing some animal sounds, only to find out that it was only a few mice.

Section Break

If you're making a jump through time, it's nice to show the reader that something has changed. One common way of doing this is with a section break. There are various ways of writing them, and here's a popular style.

* * *

The above example section break is three stars on their own line, centered, with a space between each star. Older books might use fancy symbols (e.g., ⁂ or ♦). Some authors prefer to add an extra blank line without any symbols. All of these are effective, as long as the reader can clearly see where a section break occurs.

Section Break: Example

Here's an example from *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925).

In addition to all these I can remember that Faustina O'Brien came there at least once and the Baedeker girls and young Brewer, who had his nose shot off in the war, and Mr. Albrucksburger and Miss Haag, his fiancée, and Ardita Fitz-Peters and Mr. P. Jewett, once head of the American Legion, and Miss Claudia Hip, with a man reputed to be her chauffeur, and a prince of something, whom we called Duke, and whose name, if I ever knew it, I have forgotten.

All these people came to Gatsby's house in the summer.

† † †

At nine o'clock, one morning late in July, Gatsby's gorgeous car lurched up the rocky drive to my door and gave out a burst of melody from its three-noted horn.

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Parallelism

Parallelism is the repeated use of some structure, either vocabulary or grammatical. Here are some examples with the pattern underlined.

1. Alice likes studying, sleeping, and swimming.
2. Betsy likes riding her bicycle and playing her guitar.
3. Carl's father did not approve of what he did nor what he said.

Many idioms use parallelism. Here are a few.

4. Stupid is as stupid does.
5. No pain, no gain.
6. In for a penny, in for a pound.
7. Where there is smoke, there is fire.
8. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.
9. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.

Here are some other famous examples.

10. *Bernard M. Baruch:* Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind.
11. *Charles Dickens:* It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.
12. *George W. Bush:* We've seen the unfurling of flags, the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers.
13. *Neil Armstrong:* That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.
14. *John F. Kennedy:* My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

Example: The Man I Killed

This is the opening of *The Man I Killed*. There is a long list, and the pattern "his ... was ..." shows up repeatedly. The author comes back to the pattern many times, before changing style and bluntly ending the sentence.

> His jaw was in his throat, his upper lip and teeth were gone, his one eye was shut, his other eye was a starshaped hole, his eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's, his nose was undamaged, there was a slight tear at the lobe of one ear, his clean black hair was swept upward into a cowlick at the rear of the skull, his forehead was lightly freckled, his fingernails were clean, the skin at his left cheek was peeled back in three ragged strips, his right cheek was smooth and hairless, there was a butterfly on his chin, his neck was open to the spinal cord and the blood there was thick and shiny and it was this wound that had killed him.
>
> © Tim O'Brien (1990)

The Word "And"

There are many useful conjunctions in the English language: so, but, since, however, etc. One of the most interesting is the word and. When you use the word and to connect two things, you are putting them on the same level as each other. This special kind of parallelism can be used to create surprising contrast.

15. Mary hung up the phone and moved to Japan.
16. Bruce wakes up, puts his pants on one leg at a time, and makes gold records.
17. The house was filled with many things. There was a big-screen TV on the wall, an ancient Chinese vase by the door, and a box of Domino's pizza on the table.
18. Mom made dinner that night. Fish and chips, the same as every Friday night. It was cheap and simple and perfect.
19. Hal likes to play games such as chess, tic-tac-toe, and thermonuclear war.

See the next section for a famous example.

Example: A Farewell to Arms

The following two paragraphs are the opening to Ernest Hemingway's best-selling novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterwards the road bare and white except for the leaves.

The plain was rich with crops; there were many orchards of fruit trees and beyond the plain the mountains were brown and bare. There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the flashes from the artillery. In the dark it was like summer lightning, but the nights were cool and there was not the feeling of a storm coming.

In the first paragraph, note how the troops are mixed together with trees, leaves, and dust. Also, although this is written from the narrator's perspective, we don't get much information about how he is feeling. Instead, he is listing what he sees happening around him.

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Point of View

Point of view (POV) is a starting point for how to tell a story. The choice of how to narrate your story will impact almost every sentence of it. Here are the four basic points of view.

- **First person** – The main character is "I".
- **Second person** – The main character is "you".
- **Third person** – The narrator is watching from the sidelines.
- **Mixed** – A mixture of the above.

Third Person: Limited vs. Omniscient

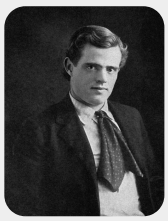
When writing in the third person, there are two variations.

- **Third person omniscient** – The narrator knows things that none of the characters do.
- **Third person limited** – The narrator only has access to what the main characters know or see. For example, the story might only be told using Alice's knowledge, or perhaps the first chapter might depend on Alice's knowledge and the second chapter might depend on Bob's knowledge.

Example: First Person

Here's the opening paragraph of *Confession* by Jack London (1876). The word "I" occurs repeatedly.

There is a woman in the state of Nevada to whom I once lied continuously, consistently, and shamelessly, for the matter of a couple of hours. I don't want to apologize to her. Far be it from me. But I do want to explain. Unfortunately, I do not know her name, much less her present address. If her eyes should chance upon these lines, I hope she will write to me.



Example: Second Person

Here's an excerpt from *Asleep in Armageddon* by Ray Bradbury (1948). The first paragraph is written in the second person, using "you" and "your".

You don't want death and you don't expect death. Something goes wrong, your rocket tilts in space, a planetoid jumps up, blackness, movement, hands over the eyes, a violent pulling back of available power in the fore-jets, the crash...

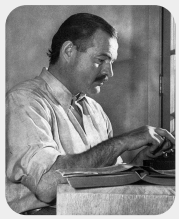
The darkness. In the darkness, the senseless pain. In the pain, the nightmare.

He was not unconscious.

Your name? asked hidden voices. *Sale*, he replied in whirling nausea. *Leonard Sale. Occupation*, cried the voices. *Spaceman!* he cried, alone in the night. *Welcome*, said the voices. *Welcome, welcome.* They faded.

Example: Third Person Limited

Here's the opening of *Banal Story* by Ernest Hemingway (1926). The descriptions are all written from the man's perspective.

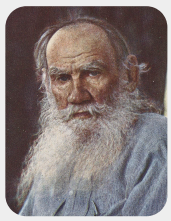


So he ate an orange, slowly spitting out the seeds. Outside, the snow was turning to rain. Inside, the electric stove seemed to give no heat and rising from his writing-table, he sat down upon the stove. How good it felt! Here, at last, was life.

He reached for another orange.

Example: Third Person Omniscient

Here's the beginning of *Work, Death and Sickness* by Leo Tolstoy (1903). The story is written entirely from the omniscient view.



A legend.

This is a legend current among the South American Indians.

God, say they, at first made men so that they had no need to work: they needed neither houses, nor clothes, nor food, and they all lived till they were a hundred, and did not know what illness was.

When, after some time, God looked to see how people were living, he saw that instead of being happy in their life, they had quarrelled with one another, and, each caring for himself, had brought matters to such a pass that far from enjoying life, they cursed it.

What's Best?

First person, third person, and mixed point of view are common. For long works, it can be difficult to use first person the entire time, so in novels we are likely to see third person and mixed points of view.

For the third person, both limited and omniscient can reasonably be used. The writer need not be too strict about distinguishing the two. That being said, too much omniscience tends to get boring. If you're making grand statements about the world, do so, and then get back to developing the characters or advancing the plot.

Second person point of view is rare because it's difficult to do well. There are few famous examples, and it's quite likely you've never read a story using this perspective. If you are going to make your own attempt, plan on a lengthy revision process.

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Tense

When writing a story, short or long, one initial choice is whether to write in the past tense or the present tense. Most short stories and novels are written in the past tense, some are written in the present tense, and on occasion a story starts in the past tense but switches to the present tense for the ending.

- Past tense example: David was hungry, so he grabbed a few bucks from his back pocket, threw the money on the counter, and ordered a cheeseburger. It arrived quickly. He scarfed it down was ready to take on the world.
- Present tense example: David is hungry, so he grabs a few bucks from his back pocket, throws the money on the counter, and orders a cheeseburger. It arrives quickly. He scarfs it down and is ready to take on the world.

The above examples express the same information. How does each of them feel? Do you have a preference?

First Person Past

This is the opening of *Four-Day Planet* by H. Beam Piper (1961), written in first person past tense.

I went through the gateway, towing my equipment in a contragravity hamper over my head. As usual, I was wondering what it would take, short of a revolution, to get the city of Port Sandor as clean and tidy and well lighted as the spaceport area. I knew Dad's editorials and my sarcastic news stories wouldn't do it. We'd been trying long enough.

The two girls in bikinis in front of me pushed on, still gabbling about the fight one of them had had with her boy friend, and I closed up behind the half dozen monster-hunters in long trousers, ankle boots and short boat-jackets, with big knives on their belts. They must have all been from the same crew, because they weren't arguing about whose ship was fastest, had the toughest skipper, and made the most money. They were talking about the price of tallow-wax, and they seemed to have picked up a rumor that it was going to be cut another ten centisols a pound. I eavesdropped shamelessly, but it was the same rumor I'd picked up, myself, a little earlier.

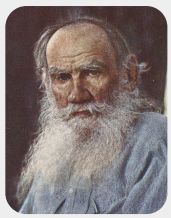
"Hi, Walt," somebody behind me called out. "Looking for some news that's fit to print?"

Third Person Past

This is the opening of How Much Land Does a Man Need? by Leo Tolstoy (1886), written in third person past tense.

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a tradesman in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat over their tea talking, the elder began to boast of the advantages of town life: saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children

wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theater, promenades, and entertainments.



The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a tradesman, and stood up for that of a peasant.

'I would not change my way of life for yours,' said she. 'We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn more than you need, you are very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, "Loss and gain are brothers twain." It often happens that people who are wealthy one day are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life is not a fat one, it is a long one. We shall never grow rich, but we shall always have enough to eat.'

First Person Present

This is the opening of *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1877), written in first person present tense. The story later changes to first person past.

I am a ridiculous person. Now they call me a madman. That would be a promotion if it were not that I remain as ridiculous in their eyes as before. But now I do not resent it, they are all dear to me now, even when they laugh at me—and, indeed, it is just then that they are particularly dear to me. I could join in their laughter—not exactly at myself, but through affection for them, if I did not feel so sad as I look at them. Sad because they do not know the truth and I do know it. Oh, how hard it is to be the only one who knows the truth! But they won't understand that. No, they won't understand it.

Third Person Present

This is the opening of a chapter in *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens (1853), written in third person present tense. The book switches between this and first person past tense.

While Esther sleeps, and while Esther wakes, it is still wet weather down at the place in Lincolnshire. The rain is ever falling, drip, drip, drip, by day and night, upon the broad flagged terrace-pavement, The Ghost's Walk. The weather is so very bad, down in Lincolnshire, that the liveliest imagination can scarcely apprehend its ever being fine again. Not that there is any superabundant life of imagination on the spot, for Sir Leicester is not here (and, truly, even if he were, would not do much for it in that particular), but is in Paris, with my Lady; and solitude, with dusky wings, sits brooding upon Chesney Wold.

What's Best?

1. **Decide the tense and point of view early on.** If you can't make up your mind, try one setup for ten minutes, try another setup for ten more minutes, and see which sounds better.
2. **Both tenses are perfectly fine.**

3. **Present tense can feel vivid.** When done well, an action scene might feel like a movie. As a result, some writers use this tense when writing action-heavy work, especially short stories. Also, present tense can be used effectively with unreliable narrators. The narrator might omit key details or misinterpret situations, the reader finds out later, and this changes the reader's reaction to previous events.
4. **Past tense is the most common.** Readers are familiar with it. Also, past tense allows a great deal of flexibility. If you're jumping around in time, past tense is probably a good choice. Most of us ordinarily use the past tense to tell stories aloud to people around us, so we're already prepared to do so in writing.
5. **Take care when switching tenses.** It's possible to use both past and present tense in one story, but don't change tenses often, and carefully proofread any transitions. Many new authors accidentally switch between tenses, which distracts and annoys the reader.

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Theme

The theme is “the central idea that the writing explores” (Glatch, 2024). Let’s think of it as a fairly general notion. Here are a few examples:

1. Circle of life
2. Coming of age
3. Forbidden love
4. Man vs. nature
5. Redemption
6. Revenge
7. The American Dream
8. War

During or after you’ve written a story, you can easily identify the theme contained therein.

Message

The message is “a specific idea that the author is trying to convey to the reader”. Some writers go to great lengths to send a message through their stories, and you can do likewise if it helps you write better. However, other writers strongly object to messages.

> The notion that a story has a message assumes that it can be reduced to a few abstract words, neatly summarized in a school or college examination paper or a brisk critical review.
>
> Ursula K. Le Guin

> Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.
>
> Mark Twain

Indeed, if your story can be replaced by a single sentence summarizing everything of value in it, why did you bother to write the whole thing? Many people hold the view that messages are for readers to discover, and if you ask the reader, they’ll tell you what they learned or felt.

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The Blind Man

Kate Chopin (February 8, 1850–August 22, 1904) was an American author of short stories and novels. Katherine O'Flaherty was born in St. Louis. Later, she married her husband, Oscar Chopin, and they moved to New Orleans. After her husband's untimely death, Kate eventually returned to St. Louis and began writing. Her most famous novel is *The Awakening* (1899).

The Blind Man

Kate Chopin
1897

A man carrying a small red box in one hand walked slowly down the street. His old straw hat and faded garments looked as if the rain had often beaten upon them, and the sun had as many times dried them upon his person. He was not old, but he seemed feeble; and he walked in the sun, along the blistering asphalt pavement. On the opposite side of the street there were trees that threw a thick and pleasant shade: people were all walking on that side. But the man did not know, for he was blind, and moreover he was stupid.

In the red box were lead pencils, which he was endeavoring to sell. He carried no stick, but guided himself by trailing his foot along the stone copings or his hand along the iron railings. When he came to the steps of a house he would mount them. Sometimes, after reaching the door with great difficulty, he could not find the electric button, whereupon he would patiently descend and go his way. Some of the iron gates were locked, their owners being away for the summer, and he would consume much time striving to open them, which made little difference, as he had all the time there was at his disposal.

At times he succeeded in finding the electric button: but the man or maid who answered the bell needed no pencil, nor could they be induced to disturb the mistress of the house about so small a thing.

The man had been out long and had walked far, but had sold nothing. That morning someone who had finally grown tired of having him hanging around had equipped him with this box of pencils, and sent him out to make his living. Hunger, with sharp fangs, was gnawing at his stomach and a consuming thirst parched his mouth and tortured him. The sun was broiling. He wore too much clothing—a vest and coat over his shirt. He might have removed these and carried them on his arm or thrown them away; but he did not think of it. A kind woman who saw him from an upper window felt sorry for him, and wished that he would cross over into the shade.

The man drifted into a side street, where there was a group of noisy, excited children at play. The color of the box which he carried attracted them and they wanted to know what was in it. One of them attempted to take it away from him. With the instinct to protect his own and his only means of sustenance, he resisted, shouted at the children and called them names. A policeman coming round the corner and seeing that he was the centre of a disturbance, jerked him violently around by the collar; but upon perceiving that he was blind, considerably refrained from clubbing him and sent him on his way. He walked on in the sun.

During his aimless rambling he turned into a street where there were monster electric cars thundering up and down, clanging wild bells and literally shaking the ground beneath his feet with their terrific impetus. He started to cross the street.

Then something happened—something horrible happened that made the women faint and the strongest men who saw it grow sick and dizzy. The motorman's lips were as gray as his face, and that was ashen gray; and he shook and staggered from the superhuman effort he had put forth to stop his car.

Where could the crowds have come from so suddenly, as if by magic? Boys on the run, men and women tearing up on their wheels to see the sickening sight: doctors dashing up in buggies as if directed by Providence.

And the horror grew when the multitude recognized in the dead and mangled figure one of the wealthiest, most useful and most influential men of the town, a man noted for his prudence and foresight. How could such a terrible fate have overtaken him? He was hastening from his business house, for he was late, to join his family, who were to start in an hour or two for their summer home on the Atlantic coast. In his hurry he did not perceive the other car coming from the opposite direction and the common, harrowing thing was repeated.

The blind man did not know what the commotion was all about. He had crossed the street, and there he was, stumbling on in the sun, trailing his foot along the coping.

Study Questions

1. What can we guess about the blind man's economic situation?
2. Are the children friendly?
3. Is the policeman a kind person?
4. Who wants to help the blind man?
5. The story makes a sudden shift. In what sentence does this happen?
6. In the last paragraph, the blind man doesn't know what happened. Why?

The Story of an Hour

Kate Chopin (February 8, 1850–August 22, 1904) was an American author of short stories and novels. Katherine O'Flaherty was born in St. Louis. Later, she married her husband, Oscar Chopin, and they moved to New Orleans. After her husband's untimely death, Kate eventually returned to St. Louis and began writing. Her most famous novel is *The Awakening* (1899).

The Story of an Hour

Kate Chopin
1894

Part 1

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.

* * *

Part 2

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will–as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him–sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door–you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

* * *

Part 3

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom.

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.

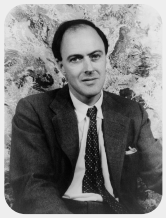
When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease–of the joy that kills.

Study Questions

1. What is ironic about the last sentence?
2. Did the story end the way you expected it would?
3. Which phrases or phrases were especially important to the story?

Lamb to the Slaughter

Roald Dahl (September 13, 1916–November 23, 1990) was a British writer. He is most famous for writing children's books and short stories, including *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *The BFG*, all of which were later made into movies. Along with children's stories, he also write a multitude of short stories for older audiences, and these tend to have a dark feel.



Lamb to the Slaughter

Roald Dahl
Harper's Magazine
September 1953

The room was warm and clean, the curtains drawn, the two table lamps alight—hers and the one by the empty chair opposite. On the sideboard behind her, two tall glasses, soda water, whiskey. Fresh ice cubes in the Thermos bucket.

Mary Maloney was waiting for her husband to come home from work.

Now and again she would glance up at the clock, but without anxiety, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made it nearer the time when he would come. There was a slow smiling air about her, and about everything she did. The drop of a head as she bent over her sewing was curiously tranquil. Her skin—for this was her sixth month with child—had acquired a wonderful translucent quality, the mouth was soft, and the eyes, with their new placid look, seemed larger darker than before. When the clock said ten minutes to five, she began to listen, and a few moments later, punctually as always, she heard the tires on the gravel outside, and the car door slamming, the footsteps passing the window, the key turning in the lock. She laid aside her sewing, stood up, and went forward to kiss him as he came in.

"Hullo darling," she said.

"Hullo darling," he answered.

She took his coat and hung it in the closet. Then she walked over and made the drinks, a strongish one for him, a weak one for herself; and soon she was back again in her chair with the sewing, and he in the other, opposite, holding the tall glass with both hands, rocking it so the ice cubes tinkled against the side.

For her, this was always a blissful time of day. She knew he didn't want to speak much until the first drink was finished, and she, on her side, was content to sit quietly, enjoying his company after the long hours alone in the house. She loved to luxuriate in the presence of this man, and to feel—almost as a sunbather feels the sun—that warm male glow that came out of him to her when they were alone together. She loved him for the way he sat loosely in a chair, for the way he came in a door, or moved slowly across the room with long strides. She loved intent, far look in his eyes when they rested in her, the funny shape of the mouth, and especially the way he remained silent about his tiredness, sitting still with himself until the whiskey had taken some of it away.

"Tired darling?"

“Yes,” he said. “I’m tired,” And as he spoke, he did an unusual thing. He lifted his glass and drained it in one swallow although there was still half of it, at least half of it left. She wasn’t really watching him, but she knew what he had done because she heard the ice cubes falling back against the bottom of the empty glass when he lowered his arm. He paused a moment, leaning forward in the chair, then he got up and went slowly over to fetch himself another.

“I’ll get it!” she cried, jumping up.

“Sit down,” he said.

When he came back, she noticed that the new drink was dark amber with the quantity of whiskey in it.

“Darling, shall I get your slippers?”

“No.”

She watched him as he began to sip the dark yellow drink, and she could see little oily swirls in the liquid because it was so strong.

“I think it’s a shame,” she said, “that when a policeman gets to be as senior as you, they keep him walking about on his feet all day long.”

He didn’t answer, so she bent her head again and went on with her sewing; but each time he lifted the drink to his lips, she heard the ice cubes clinking against the side of the glass.

“Darling,” she said. “Would you like me to get you some cheese? I haven’t made any supper because it’s Thursday.”

“No,” he said.

“If you’re too tired to eat out,” she went on, “it’s still not too late. There’s plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer, and you can have it right here and not even move out of the chair.”

Her eyes waited on him for an answer, a smile, a little nod, but he made no sign.

“Anyway,” she went on, “I’ll get you some cheese and crackers first.”

“I don’t want it,” he said.

She moved uneasily in her chair, the large eyes still watching his face. “But you must eat! I’ll fix it anyway, and then you can have it or not, as you like.”

She stood up and placed her sewing on the table by the lamp.

“Sit down,” he said. “Just for a minute, sit down.”

It wasn’t till then that she began to get frightened.

“Go on,” he said. “Sit down.”

She lowered herself back slowly into the chair, watching him all the time with those large, bewildered eyes. He had finished the second drink and was staring down into the glass, frowning.

“Listen,” he said. “I’ve got something to tell you.”

“What is it, darling? What’s the matter?”

He had now become absolutely motionless, and he kept his head down so that the light from the lamp beside him fell across the upper part of his face, leaving the chin and mouth in shadow. She noticed there was a little muscle moving near the corner of his left eye.

“This is going to be a bit of a shock to you, I’m afraid,” he said. “But I’ve thought about it a good deal and I’ve decided the only thing to do is tell you right away. I hope you won’t blame me too much.”

And he told her. It didn’t take long, four or five minutes at most, and she say very still through it all, watching him with a kind of dazed horror as he went further and further away from her with each word.

“So there it is,” he added. “And I know it’s kind of a bad time to be telling you, bet there simply wasn’t any other way. Of course I’ll give you money and see you’re looked after. But there needn’t really be any fuss. I hope not anyway. It wouldn’t be very good for my job.”

Her first instinct was not to believe any of it, to reject it all. It occurred to her that perhaps he hadn’t even spoken, that she herself had imagined the whole thing. Maybe, if she went about her business and acted as though she hadn’t been listening, then later, when she sort of woke up again, she might find none of it had ever happened.

“I’ll get the supper,” she managed to whisper, and this time he didn’t stop her.

When she walked across the room she couldn’t feel her feet touching the floor. She couldn’t feel anything at all—except a slight nausea and a desire to vomit. Everything was automatic now—down the steps to the cellar, the light switch, the deep freeze, the hand inside the cabinet taking hold of the first object it met. She lifted it out, and looked at it. It was wrapped in paper, so she took off the paper and looked at it again.

A leg of lamb.

All right then, they would have lamb for supper. She carried it upstairs, holding the thin bone-end of it with both her hands, and as she went through the living-room, she saw him standing over by the window with his back to her, and she stopped.

“For God’s sake,” he said, hearing her, but not turning round. “Don’t make supper for me. I’m going out.”

At that point, Mary Maloney simply walked up behind him and without any pause she swung the big frozen leg of lamb high in the air and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of his head.

She might just as well have hit him with a steel club.

She stepped back a pace, waiting, and the funny thing was that he remained standing there for at least four or five seconds, gently swaying. Then he crashed to the carpet.

The violence of the crash, the noise, the small table overturning, helped bring her out of he shock. She came out slowly, feeling cold and surprised, and she stood for a while blinking at the body, still holding the ridiculous piece of meat tight with both hands.

All right, she told herself. So I’ve killed him.

It was extraordinary, now, how clear her mind became all of a sudden. She began thinking very fast. As the wife of a detective, she knew quite well what the penalty would be. That was fine. It made no difference to her. In fact, it would be a relief. On the other hand, what about the child? What were the laws about murderers with unborn children? Did they kill then both—mother and child? Or did they wait until the tenth month? What did they do?

Mary Maloney didn't know. And she certainly wasn't prepared to take a chance.

She carried the meat into the kitchen, placed it in a pan, turned the oven on high, and shoved t inside. Then she washed her hands and ran upstairs to the bedroom. She sat down before the mirror, tidied her hair, touched up her lops and face. She tried a smile. It came out rather peculiar. She tried again.

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, aloud.

The voice sounded peculiar too.

"I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

That was better. Both the smile and the voice were coming out better now. She rehearsed it several times more. Then she ran downstairs, took her coat, went out the back door, down the garden, into the street.

It wasn't six o'clock yet and the lights were still on in the grocery shop.

"Hullo Sam," she said brightly, smiling at the man behind the counter.

"Why, good evening, Mrs. Maloney. How're you?"

"I want some potatoes please, Sam. Yes, and I think a can of peas."

The man turned and reached up behind him on the shelf for the peas.

"Patrick's decided he's tired and doesn't want to eat out tonight," she told him. "We usually go out Thursdays, you know, and now he's caught me without any vegetables in the house."

"Then how about meat, Mrs. Maloney?"

"No, I've got meat, thanks. I got a nice leg of lamb from the freezer."

"Oh."

"I don't know much like cooking it frozen, Sam, but I'm taking a chance on it this time. You think it'll be all right?"

"Personally," the grocer said, "I don't believe it makes any difference. You want these Idaho potatoes?"

"Oh yes, that'll be fine. Two of those."

"Anything else?" The grocer cocked his head on one side, looking at her pleasantly. "How about afterwards? What you going to give him for afterwards?"

"Well—what would you suggest, Sam?"

The man glanced around his shop. “How about a nice big slice of cheesecake? I know he likes that.”

“Perfect,” she said. “He loves it.”

And when it was all wrapped and she had paid, she put on her brightest smile and said, “Thank you, Sam. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Mrs. Maloney. And thank you.”

And now, she told herself as she hurried back, all she was doing now, she was returning home to her husband and he was waiting for his supper; and she must cook it good, and make it as tasty as possible because the poor man was tired; and if, when she entered the house, she happened to find anything unusual, or tragic, or terrible, then naturally it would be a shock and she’d become frantic with grief and horror. Mind you, she wasn’t expecting to find anything. She was just going home with the vegetables. Mrs. Patrick Maloney going home with the vegetables on Thursday evening to cook supper for her husband.

That’s the way, she told herself. Do everything right and natural. Keep things absolutely natural and there’ll be no need for any acting at all.

Therefore, when she entered the kitchen by the back door, she was humming a little tune to herself and smiling.

“Patrick!” she called. “How are you, darling?”

She put the parcel down on the table and went through into the living room; and when she saw him lying there on the floor with his legs doubled up and one arm twisted back underneath his body, it really was rather a shock. All the old love and longing for him welled up inside her, and she ran over to him, knelt down beside him, and began to cry her heart out. It was easy. No acting was necessary.

A few minutes later she got up and went to the phone. She know the number of the police station, and when the man at the other end answered, she cried to him, “Quick! Come quick! Patrick’s dead!”

“Who’s speaking?”

“Mrs. Maloney. Mrs. Patrick Maloney.”

“You mean Patrick Maloney’s dead?”

“I think so,” she sobbed. “He’s lying on the floor and I think he’s dead.”

“Be right over,” the man said.

The car came very quickly, and when she opened the front door, two policeman walked in. She know them both—she know nearly all the man at that precinct—and she fell right into a chair, then went over to join the other one, who was called O’Malley, kneeling by the body.

“Is he dead?” she cried.

“I’m afraid he is. What happened?”

Briefly, she told her story about going out to the grocer and coming back to find him on the floor. While she was talking, crying and talking, Noonan discovered a small patch of congealed blood on the dead man's head. He showed it to O'Malley who got up at once and hurried to the phone.

Soon, other men began to come into the house. First a doctor, then two detectives, one of whom she know by name. Later, a police photographer arrived and took pictures, and a man who know about fingerprints. There was a great deal of whispering and muttering beside the corpse, and the detectives kept asking her a lot of questions. But they always treated her kindly. She told her story again, this time right from the beginning, when Patrick had come in, and she was sewing, and he was tired, so tired he hadn't wanted to go out for supper. She told how she'd put the meat in the oven—"it's there now, cooking"—and how she'd slopped out to the grocer for vegetables, and come back to find him lying on the floor.

"Which grocer?" one of the detectives asked.

She told him, and he turned and whispered something to the other detective who immediately went outside into the street.

In fifteen minutes he was back with a page of notes, and there was more whispering, and through her sobbing she heard a few of the whispered phrases—"… acted quite normal… very cheerful… wanted to give him a good supper… peas… cheesecake… impossible that she…"

After a while, the photographer and the doctor departed and two other men came in and took the corpse away on a stretcher. Then the fingerprint man went away. The two detectives remained, and so did the two policeman. They were exceptionally nice to her, and Jack Noonan asked if she wouldn't rather go somewhere else, to her sister's house perhaps, or to his own wife who would take care of her and put her up for the night.

No, she said. She didn't feel she could move even a yard at the moment. Would they mind awfully of she stayed just where she was until she felt better. She didn't feel too good at the moment, she really didn't.

Then hadn't she better lie down on the bed? Jack Noonan asked.

No, she said. She'd like to stay right where she was, in this chair. A little later, perhaps, when she felt better, she would move.

So they left her there while they went about their business, searching the house. Occasionally on of the detectives asked her another question. Sometimes Jack Noonan spoke at her gently as he passed by. Her husband, he told her, had been killed by a blow on the back of the head administered with a heavy blunt instrument, almost certainly a large piece of metal. They were looking for the weapon. The murderer may have taken it with him, but on the other hand he may have thrown it away or hidden it somewhere on the premises.

"It's the old story," he said. "Get the weapon, and you've got the man."

Later, one of the detectives came up and sat beside her. Did she know, he asked, of anything in the house that could've been used as the weapon? Would she mind having a look around to see if anything was missing—a very big spanner, for example, or a heavy metal vase.

They didn't have any heavy metal vases, she said.

“Or a big spanner?”

She didn’t think they had a big spanner. But there might be some things like that in the garage.

The search went on. She knew that there were other policemen in the garden all around the house. She could hear their footsteps on the gravel outside, and sometimes she saw a flash of a torch through a chink in the curtains. It began to get late, nearly nine she noticed by the clock on the mantle. The four men searching the rooms seemed to be growing weary, a trifle exasperated.

“Jack,” she said, the next tome Sergeant Noonan went by. “Would you mind giving me a drink?”

“Sure I’ll give you a drink. You mean this whiskey?”

“Yes please. But just a small one. It might make me feel better.”

He handed her the glass.

“Why don’t you have one yourself,” she said. “You must be awfully tired. Please do. You’ve been very good to me.”

“Well,” he answered. “It’s not strictly allowed, but I might take just a drop to keep me going.”

One by one the others came in and were persuaded to take a little nip of whiskey. They stood around rather awkwardly with the drinks in their hands, uncomfortable in her presence, trying to say consoling things to her. Sergeant Noonan wandered into the kitchen, come out quickly and said, “Look, Mrs. Maloney. You know that oven of yours is still on, and the meat still inside.”

“Oh dear me!” she cried. “So it is!”

“I better turn it off for you, hadn’t I?”

“Will you do that, Jack. Thank you so much.”

When the sergeant returned the second time, she looked at him with her large, dark tearful eyes. “Jack Noonan,” she said.

“Yes?”

“Would you do me a small favor—you and these others?”

“We can try, Mrs. Maloney.”

“Well,” she said. “Here you all are, and good friends of dear Patrick’s too, and helping to catch the man who killed him. You must be terrible hungry by now because it’s long past your suppertime, and I know Patrick would never forgive me, God bless his soul, if I allowed you to remain in his house without offering you decent hospitality. Why don’t you eat up that lamb that’s in the oven. It’ll be cooked just right by now.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Sergeant Noonan said.

“Please,” she begged. “Please eat it. Personally I couldn’t tough a thing, certainly not what’s been in the house when he was here. But it’s all right for you. It’d be a favor to me if you’d eat it up. Then you can go on with your work again afterwards.”

There was a good deal of hesitating among the four policemen, but they were clearly hungry, and in the end they were persuaded to go into the kitchen and help themselves. The woman stayed where she was, listening to them speaking among themselves, their voices thick and sloppy because their mouths were full of meat.

“Have some more, Charlie?”

“No. Better not finish it.”

“She wants us to finish it. She said so. Be doing her a favor.”

“Okay then. Give me some more.”

“That’s the hell of a big club the gut must’ve used to hit poor Patrick,” one of them was saying. “The doc says his skull was smashed all to pieces just like from a sledgehammer.”

“That’s why it ought to be easy to find.”

“Exactly what I say.”

“Whoever done it, they’re not going to be carrying a thing like that around with them longer than they need.”

One of them belched.

“Personally, I think it’s right here on the premises.”

“Probably right under our very noses. What you think, Jack?”

And in the other room, Mary Maloney began to giggle.

Study Questions

1. From whose point of view is the story told?
2. What significant health information is in the third paragraph?
3. Why is Mr. Maloney planning to leave?
4. What is ironic about the meal at the end?
5. How does the title contrast with the story itself?
6. Are you sympathetic with Mary Maloney despite her actions?

Philip K. Dick (December 16, 1928–March 2, 1982) was an American science fiction writer. He wrote 44 novels and 121 short stories, and his work significantly influenced the entire genre. His 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, considered by many to be the beginning of cyberpunk, was the basis for the movie *Blade Runner* (1982). The movies *Total Recall* (1990) and *Minority Report* (2002) are also based on his stories.

The Eyes Have It

Philip K. Dick
Science Fiction Stories (1953)

It was quite by accident I discovered this incredible invasion of Earth by lifeforms from another planet. As yet, I haven't done anything about it; I can't think of anything to do. I wrote to the Government, and they sent back a pamphlet on the repair and maintenance of frame houses. Anyhow, the whole thing is known; I'm not the first to discover it. Maybe it's even under control.

I was sitting in my easy-chair, idly turning the pages of a paperbacked book someone had left on the bus, when I came across the reference that first put me on the trail. For a moment I didn't respond. It took some time for the full import to sink in. After I'd comprehended, it seemed odd I hadn't noticed it right away.

The reference was clearly to a nonhuman species of incredible properties, not indigenous to Earth. A species, I hasten to point out, customarily masquerading as ordinary human beings. Their disguise, however, became transparent in the face of the following observations by the author. It was at once obvious the author knew everything. Knew everything — and was taking it in his stride. The line (and I tremble remembering it even now) read:

... his eyes slowly roved about the room.

Vague chills assailed me. I tried to picture the eyes. Did they roll like dimes? The passage indicated not; they seemed to move through the air, not over the surface. Rather rapidly, apparently. No one in the story was surprised. That's what tipped me off. No sign of amazement at such an outrageous thing. Later the matter was amplified.

... his eyes moved from person to person.

There it was in a nutshell. The eyes had clearly come apart from the rest of him and were on their own. My heart pounded and my breath choked in my windpipe. I had stumbled on an accidental mention of a totally unfamiliar race. Obviously non-Terrestrial. Yet, to the characters in the book, it was perfectly natural — which suggested they belonged to the same species.

And the author? A slow suspicion burned in my mind. The author was taking it rather too easily in his stride. Evidently, he felt this was quite a usual thing. He made absolutely no attempt to conceal this knowledge. The story continued:

... presently his eyes fastened on Julia.

Julia, being a lady, had at least the breeding to feel indignant. She is described as blushing and knitting her brows angrily. At this, I sighed with relief. They weren't all non-Terrestrials. The narrative continues:

... slowly, calmly, his eyes examined every inch of her.

Great Scott! But here the girl turned and stomped off and the matter ended. I lay back in my chair gasping with horror. My wife and family regarded me in wonder.

"What's wrong, dear?" my wife asked.

I couldn't tell her. Knowledge like this was too much for the ordinary run-of-the-mill person. I had to keep it to myself. "Nothing," I gasped. I leaped up, snatched the book, and hurried out of the room.

* * *

In the garage, I continued reading. There was more. Trembling, I read the next revealing passage:

... he put his arm around Julia. Presently she asked him if he would remove his arm. He immediately did so, with a smile.

It's not said what was done with the arm after the fellow had removed it. Maybe it was left standing upright in the corner. Maybe it was thrown away. I don't care. In any case, the full meaning was there, staring me right in the face.

Here was a race of creatures capable of removing portions of their anatomy at will. Eyes, arms — and maybe more. Without batting an eyelash. My knowledge of biology came in handy, at this point. Obviously they were simple beings, uni-cellular, some sort of primitive single-celled things. Beings no more developed than starfish. Starfish can do the same thing, you know.

I read on. And came to this incredible revelation, tossed off coolly by the author without the faintest tremor:

... outside the movie theater we split up. Part of us went inside, part over to the cafe for dinner.

Binary fission, obviously. Splitting in half and forming two entities. Probably each lower half went to the cafe, it being farther, and the upper halves to the movies. I read on, hands shaking. I had really stumbled onto something here. My mind reeled as I made out this passage:

... I'm afraid there's no doubt about it. Poor Bibney has lost his head again.

Which was followed by:

... and Bob says he has utterly no guts.

Yet Bibney got around as well as the next person. The next person, however, was just as strange. He was soon described as:

... totally lacking in brains.

* * *

There was no doubt of the thing in the next passage. Julia, whom I had thought to be the one normal person, reveals herself as also being an alien life form, similar to the rest:

… quite deliberately, Julia had given her heart to the young man.

It didn't relate what the final disposition of the organ was, but I didn't really care. It was evident Julia had gone right on living in her usual manner, like all the others in the book. Without heart, arms, eyes, brains, viscera, dividing up in two when the occasion demanded. Without a qualm.

… thereupon she gave him her hand.

I sickened. The rascal now had her hand, as well as her heart. I shudder to think what he's done with them, by this time.

… he took her arm.

Not content to wait, he had to start dismantling her on his own. Flushing crimson, I slammed the book shut and leaped to my feet. But not in time to escape one last reference to those carefree bits of anatomy whose travels had originally thrown me on the track:

… her eyes followed him all the way down the road and across the meadow.

I rushed from the garage and back inside the warm house, as if the accursed things were following me. My wife and children were playing Monopoly in the kitchen. I joined them and played with frantic fervor, brow feverish, teeth chattering.

I had had enough of the thing. I want to hear no more about it. Let them come on. Let them invade Earth. I don't want to get mixed up in it.

I have absolutely no stomach for it.

Study Questions

1. Is the title too obvious?
2. What is the best joke in the story? What is the worst one?
3. The author describes the narrator in a way that suggests he's a conspiracy theorist. What sentences depict this?

An Extinct Angel

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (July 3, 1860–August 17, 1935), also known as Charlotte Perkins Stetson, was an American author. She advocated for social change and was a role model for future feminists. As a writer, she wrote both fiction and nonfiction, including ranging from short stories and novels to essays. Perhaps her most famous work is *The Yellow Wallpaper*, a short story published in 1892.

An Extinct Angel

Charlotte Perkins Gilman
1891

There was once a species of angel inhabiting this planet, acting as “a universal solvent” to all the jarring, irreconcilable elements of human life.

It was quite numerous; almost every family had one; and, although differing in degree of seraphic virtue, all were, by common consent, angels.

The advantages of possessing such a creature were untold. In the first place, the chances of the mere human being in the way of getting to heaven were greatly increased by these semi-heavenly belongings; they gave one a sort of lien on the next world, a practical claim most comforting to the owner.

For the angels of course possessed virtues above mere humanity; and because the angels were so well-behaved, therefore the owners were given credit.

Beside this direct advantage of complimentary tickets up above were innumerable indirect advantages below. The possession of one of these angels smoothed every feature of life, and gave peace and joy to an otherwise hard lot.

It was the business of the angel to assuage, to soothe, to comfort, to delight. No matter how unruly were the passions of the owner, sometimes even to the extent of legally beating his angel with “a stick no thicker than his thumb,” the angel was to have no passion whatever—unless self-sacrifice may be called a passion, and indeed it often amounted to one with her.

The human creature went out to his daily toil and comforted himself as he saw fit.

He was apt to come home tired and cross, and in this exigency it was the business of the angel to wear a smile for his benefit—a soft, perennial, heavenly smile.

By an unfortunate limitation of humanity the angel was required, in addition to such celestial duties as smiling and soothing, to do kitchen service, cleaning, sewing, nursing, and other mundane tasks. But these things must be accomplished without the slightest diminution of the angelic virtues.

The angelic virtues, by the way, were of a curiously paradoxical nature.

They were inherent. A human being did not pretend to name them, could not be expected to have them, acknowledged them as far beyond his gross earthly nature; and yet, for all this, he kept constant watch over the virtues of the angel, wrote whole books of advice

for angels on how they should behave, and openly held that angels would lose their virtues altogether should they once cease to obey the will and defer to the judgment of human kind.

This looks strange to us to-day as we consider these past conditions, but then it seemed fair enough; and the angels—bless their submissive, patient hearts!—never thought of questioning it.

It was perhaps only to be expected that when an angel fell the human creature should punish the celestial creature with unrelenting fury. It was so much easier to be an angel than to be human, that there was no excuse for an angel's falling, even by means of her own angelic pity and tender affection.

It seems perhaps hard that the very human creature the angel fell on, or fell with, or fell to—however you choose to put it—was as harsh as anyone in condemnation of the fall. He never assisted the angel to rise, but got out from under and resumed his way, leaving her in the mud. She was a great convenience to walk on, and, as was stoutly maintained by the human creature, helped keep the other angels clean.

This is exceedingly mysterious, and had better not be inquired into too closely.

The amount of physical labor of a severe and degrading sort required of one of these bright spirits, was amazing. Certain kinds of work—always and essentially dirty—were relegated wholly to her. Yet one of her first and most rigid duties was the keeping of her angelic robes spotlessly clean.

The human creature took great delight in contemplating the flowing robes of the angels. Their changeful motion suggested to him all manner of sweet and lovely thoughts and memories; also, the angelic virtues above mentioned were supposed largely to inhere in the flowing robes. Therefore flow they must, and the ample garments waved unchecked over the weary limbs of the wearer, the contiguous furniture and the stairs. For the angels unfortunately had no wings, and their work was such as required a good deal of going up and down stairs.

It is quite a peculiar thing, in contemplating this work, to see how largely it consisted in dealing with dirt. Yes, it does seem strange to this enlightened age; but the fact was that the angels waited on the human creatures in every form of menial service, doing things as their natural duty which the human creature loathed and scorned.

It does seem irreconcilable, but they reconciled it. The angel was an angel and the work was the angel's work, and what more do you want?

There is one thing about the subject which looks a little suspicious: The angels—I say it under breath—were not very bright!

The human creatures did not like intelligent angels—intelligence seemed to dim their shine, somehow, and pale their virtues. It was harder to reconcile things where the angels had any sense. Therefore every possible care was taken to prevent the angels from learning anything of our gross human wisdom.

But little by little, owing to the unthought-of consequences of repeated intermarriage between the angel and the human being, the angel longed for, found and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge.

And in that day she surely died.

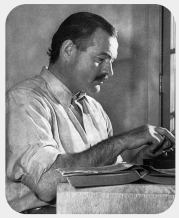
The species is now extinct. It is rumored that here and there in remote regions you can still find a solitary specimen—in places where no access is to be had to the deadly fruit; but the race as a race is extinct.

Poor dodo!

Study Questions

1. Are the last three paragraphs positive or negative?
2. In the fourth paragraph, what virtue of angels is mentioned?
3. The entire story is an allegory. When the author writes about angels, what is she actually describing?

Hills Like White Elephants



Ernest Miller Hemingway (July 21, 1899–July 2, 1961) was an American writer. One characteristic of his writing is its simple and understated style, and this greatly influenced many subsequent authors. Hemingway's famous books include *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). His short stories include *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1936) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). He won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.

Hills Like White Elephants

Ernest Hemingway
1927

The hills across the valley of the Ebro were long and white. On this side there was no shade and no trees and the station was between two lines of rails in the sun. Close against the side of the station there was the warm shadow of the building and a curtain, made of strings of bamboo beads, hung across the open door into the bar, to keep out flies. The American and the girl with him sat at a table in the shade, outside the building. It was very hot and the express from Barcelona would come in forty minutes. It stopped at this junction for two minutes and went on to Madrid.

"What should we drink?" the girl asked. She had taken off her hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the man said.

"Let's drink beer."

"*Dos cervezas*," the man said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a woman asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones."

The woman brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. She put the felt pads and the beer glasses on the table and looked at the man and the girl. The girl was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," she said.

"I've never seen one," the man drank his beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the man said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

The girl looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," she said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro. It's a drink."

“Could we try it?”

The man called “Listen” through the curtain. The woman came out from the bar.

“Four reales.”

“We want two Anis del Toro.”

“With water?”

“Do you want it with water?”

“I don’t know,” the girl said. “Is it good with water?”

“It’s all right.”

“You want them with water?” asked the woman.

“Yes, with water.”

“It tastes like licorice,” the girl said and put the glass down.

“That’s the way with everything.”

“Yes,” said the girl. “Everything tastes of licorice. Especially all the things you’ve waited so long for, like absinthe.”

“Oh, cut it out.”

“You started it,” the girl said. “I was being amused. I was having a fine time.”

“Well, let’s try and have a fine time.”

“All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn’t that bright?”

“That was bright.”

“I wanted to try this new drink. That’s all we do, isn’t it—look at things and try new drinks?”

“I guess so.”

The girl looked across at the hills.

“They’re lovely hills,” she said. “They don’t really look like white elephants. I just meant the coloring of their skin through the trees.”

“Should we have another drink?”

“All right.”

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

“The beer’s nice and cool,” the man said.

“It’s lovely,” the girl said.

“It’s really an awfully simple operation, Jig,” the man said. “It’s not really an operation at all.”

The girl looked at the ground the table legs rested on.

“I know you wouldn’t mind it, Jig. It’s really not anything. It’s just to let the air in.”

The girl did not say anything.

“I’ll go with you and I’ll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in and then it’s all perfectly natural.”

“Then what will we do afterward?”

“We’ll be fine afterward. Just like we were before.”

“What makes you think so?”

“That’s the only thing that bothers us. It’s the only thing that’s made us unhappy.”

The girl looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

“And you think then we’ll be all right and be happy.”

“I know we will. You don’t have to be afraid. I’ve known lots of people that have done it.”

“So have I,” said the girl. “And afterward they were all so happy.”

“Well,” the man said, “if you don’t want to you don’t have to. I wouldn’t have you do it if you didn’t want to. But I know it’s perfectly simple.”

“And you really want to?”

“I think it’s the best thing to do. But I don’t want you to do it if you don’t really want to.”

“And if I do it you’ll be happy and things will be like they were and you’ll love me?”

“I love you now. You know I love you.”

“I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you’ll like it?”

“I’ll love it. I love it now but I just can’t think about it. You know how I get when I worry.”

“If I do it you won’t ever worry?”

“I won’t worry about that because it’s perfectly simple.”

“Then I’ll do it. Because I don’t care about me.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t care about me.”

“Well, I care about you.”

“Oh, yes. But I don’t care about me. And I’ll do it and then everything will be fine.”

“I don’t want you to do it if you feel that way.”

The girl stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.

“And we could have all this,” she said. “And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible.”

“What did you say?”

“I said we could have everything.”

“We can have everything.”

“No, we can’t.”

“We can have the whole world.”

“No, we can’t.”

“We can go everywhere.”

“No, we can’t. It isn’t ours any more.”

“It’s ours.”

“No, it isn’t. And once they take it away, you never get it back.”

“But they haven’t taken it away.”

“We’ll wait and see.”

“Come on back in the shade,” he said. “You mustn’t feel that way.”

“I don’t feel any way,” the girl said. “I just know things.”

“I don’t want you to do anything that you don’t want to do—”

“Nor that isn’t good for me,” she said. “I know. Could we have another beer?”

“All right. But you’ve got to realize—”

“I realize,” the girl said. “Can’t we maybe stop talking?”

They sat down at the table and the girl looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the man looked at her and at the table.

“You’ve got to realize,” he said, “that I don’t want you to do it if you don’t want to. I’m perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you.”

“Doesn’t it mean anything to you? We could get along.”

“Of course it does. But I don’t want anybody but you. I don’t want any one else. And I know it’s perfectly simple.”

“Yes, you know it’s perfectly simple.”

“It’s all right for you to say that, but I do know it.”

“Would you do something for me now?”

“I’d do anything for you.”

“Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?”

He did not say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.

“But I don’t want you to,” he said, “I don’t care anything about it.”

“I’ll scream,” the girl said.

The woman came out through the curtains with two glasses of beer and put them down on the damp felt pads. “The train comes in five minutes,” she said.

“What did she say?” asked the girl.

“That the train is coming in five minutes.”

The girl smiled brightly at the woman, to thank her.

“I’d better take the bags over to the other side of the station,” the man said. She smiled at him.

“All right. Then come back and we’ll finish the beer.”

He picked up the two heavy bags and carried them around the station to the other tracks. He looked up the tracks but could not see the train. Coming back, he walked through the barroom, where people waiting for the train were drinking. He drank an Anis at the bar and looked at the people. They were all waiting reasonably for the train. He went out through the bead curtain. She was sitting at the table and smiled at him.

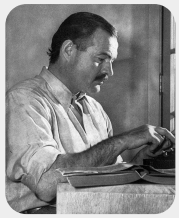
“Do you feel better?” he asked.

“I feel fine,” she said. “There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.”

Study Questions

1. What is a “white elephant”? Consult a good dictionary.
2. What kind of person is the man?
3. Are the couple happy?
4. What is the “awfully simple operation” to which the man refers?
5. Does the girl act independently? If so, when?

Ernest Miller Hemingway (July 21, 1899–July 2, 1961) was an American writer. One characteristic of his writing is its simple and understated style, and this greatly influenced many subsequent authors. Hemingway's famous books include *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). His short stories include *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1936) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952). He won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.



Soldier's Home

Ernest Hemingway
1925

Krebs went to the war from a Methodist college in Kansas. There is a picture which shows him among his fraternity brothers, all of them wearing exactly the same height and style collar. He enlisted in the Marines in 1917 and did not return to the United States until the second division returned from the Rhine in the summer of 1919.

There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture.

By the time Krebs returned to his home town in Oklahoma the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late. The men from the town who had been drafted had all been welcomed elaborately on their return. There had been a great deal of hysteria. Now the reaction had set in. People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late, years after the war was over.

At first Krebs, who had been at Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in the Argonne did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told. All of the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves.

His lies were quite unimportant lies and consisted in attributing to himself things other men had seen, done or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers. Even his lies were not sensational at the pool room. His acquaintances, who had heard detailed accounts of German women found chained to machine guns in the Argonne forest and who could not comprehend, or were barred by their patriotism from interest in, any German machine gunners who were not chained, were not thrilled by his stories.

Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration, and when he occasionally met another man who had really been a soldier and they talked a few minutes in the dressing room at a dance he fell into the easy pose

of the old soldier among other soldiers: that he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time. In this way he lost everything.

During this time, it was late summer, he was sleeping late in bed, getting up to walk down town to the library to get a book, eating lunch at home, reading on the front porch until he became bored and then walking down through the town to spend the hottest hours of the day in the cool dark of the pool room. He loved to play pool.

In the evening he practiced on his clarinet, strolled down town, read and went to bed. He was still a hero to his two young sisters. His mother would have given him breakfast in bed if he had wanted it. She often came in when he was in bed and asked him to tell her about the war, but her attention always wandered. His father was non-committal.

Before Krebs went away to the war he had never been allowed to drive the family motor car. His father was in the real estate business and always wanted the car to be at his command when he required it to take clients out into the country to show them a piece of farm property. The car always stood outside the First National Bank building where his father had an office on the second floor. Now, after the war, it was still the same car.

Nothing was changed in the town except that the young girls had grown up. But they lived in such a complicated world of already defined alliances and shifting feuds that Krebs did not feel the energy or the courage to break into it. He liked to look at them, though. There were so many good-looking young girls. Most of them had their hair cut short. When he went away only little girls wore their hair like that or girls that were fast. They all wore sweaters and shirt waists with round Dutch collars. It was a pattern. He liked to look at them from the front porch as they walked on the other side of the street. He liked to watch them walking under the shade of the trees. He liked the round Dutch collars above their sweaters. He liked their silk stockings and flat shoes. He liked their bobbed hair and the way they walked.

When he was in town their appeal to him was not very strong. He did not like them when he saw them in the Greek's ice cream parlor. He did not want them themselves really. They were too complicated. There was something else. Vaguely he wanted a girl but he did not want to have to work to get her. He would have liked to have a girl but he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics. He did not want to have to do any courting. He did not want to tell any more lies. It wasn't worth it.

He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences. Besides he did not really need a girl. The army had taught him that. It was all right to pose as though you had to have a girl. Nearly everybody did that. But it wasn't true. You did not need a girl. That was the funny thing. First a fellow boasted how girls mean nothing to him, that he never thought of them, that they could not touch him. Then a fellow boasted that he could not get along without girls, that he had to have them all the time, that he could not go to sleep without them.

That was all a lie. It was all a lie both ways. You did not need a girl unless you thought about them. He learned that in the army. Then sooner or later you always got one. When you were really ripe for a girl you always got one. You did not have to think about it. Sooner or later it would come. He had learned that in the army.

Now he would have liked a girl if she had come to him and not wanted to talk. But here at home it was all too complicated. He knew he could never get through it all again. It was not worth the trouble. That was the thing about French girls and German girls. There was not all this talking. You couldn't talk much and you did not need to talk. It was simple and you were friends. He thought about France and then he began to think about Germany.

On the whole he had liked Germany better. He did not want to leave Germany. He did not want to come home. Still, he had come home. He sat on the front porch.

He liked the girls that were walking along the other side of the street. He liked the look of them much better than the French girls or the German girls. But the world they were in was not the world he was in. He would like to have one of them. But it was not worth it. They were such a nice pattern. He liked the pattern. It was exciting. But he would not go through all the talking. He did not want one badly enough. He liked to look at them all, though. It was not worth it. Not now when things were getting good again.

He sat there on the porch reading a book on the war. It was a history and he was reading about all the engagements he had been in. It was the most interesting reading he had ever done. He wished there were more maps. He looked forward with a good feeling to reading all the really good histories when they would come out with good detail maps. Now he was really learning about the war. He had been a good soldier. That made a difference.

One morning after he had been home about a month his mother came into his bedroom and sat on the bed. She smoothed her apron.

“I had a talk with your father last night, Harold,” she said, “and he is willing for you to take the car out in the evenings.”

“Yeah?” said Krebs, who was not fully awake. “Take the car out? Yeah?”

“Yes. Your father has felt for some time that you should be able to take the car out in the evenings whenever you wished but we only talked it over last night.”

“I’ll bet you made him,” Krebs said.

“No. It was your father’s suggestion that we talk the matter over.”

“Yeah. I’ll bet you made him,” Krebs sat up in bed.

“Will you come down to breakfast, Harold?” his mother said.

“As soon as I get my clothes on,” Krebs said.

His mother went out of the room and he could hear her frying something downstairs while he washed, shaved and dressed to go down into the dining-room for breakfast. While he was eating breakfast his sister brought in the mail.

“Well, Hare,” she said. “You old sleepy-head. What do you ever get up for?”

Krebs looked at her. He liked her. She was his best sister.

“Have you got the paper?” he asked.

She handed him the Kansas City Star and he shucked off its brown wrapper and opened it to the sporting page. He folded the Star open and propped it against the water pitcher with his cereal dish to steady it, so he could read while he ate.

“Harold,” his mother stood in the kitchen doorway, “Harold, please don’t muss up the paper. Your father can’t read his Star if it’s been mussed.”

“I won’t muss it,” Krebs said.

His sister sat down at the table and watched him while he read.

“We’re playing indoor over at school this afternoon,” she said. “I’m going to pitch.”

“Good,” said Krebs. “How’s the old wing?”

“I can pitch better than lots of the boys. I tell them all you taught me. The other girls aren’t much good.”

“Yeah?” said Krebs.

“I tell them all you’re my beau. Aren’t you my beau, Hare?”

“You bet.”

“Couldn’t your brother really be your beau just because he’s your brother?”

“I don’t know.”

“Sure you know. Couldn’t you be my beau, Hare, if I was old enough and if you wanted to?”

“Sure. You’re my girl now.”

“Am I really your girl?”

“Sure.”

“Do you love me?”

“Uh, huh.”

“Will you love me always?”

“Sure.”

“Will you come over and watch me play indoor?”

“Maybe.”

“Aw, Hare, you don’t love me. If you loved me, you’d want to come over and watch me play indoor.”

Krebs’s mother came into the dining-room from the kitchen. She carried a plate with two fried eggs and some crisp bacon on it and a plate of buckwheat cakes.

“You run along, Helen,” she said. “I want to talk to Harold.”

She put the eggs and bacon down in front of him and brought in a jug of maple syrup for the buckwheat cakes. Then she sat down across the table from Krebs.

“I wish you’d put down the paper a minute, Harold,” she said.

Krebs took down the paper and folded it.

“Have you decided what you are going to do yet, Harold?” his mother said, taking off her glasses.

“No,” said Krebs.

“Don’t you think it’s about time?” His mother did not say this in a mean way. She seemed worried.

“I hadn’t thought about it,” Krebs said.

“God has some work for everyone to do,” his mother said. “There can be no idle hands in His Kingdom.”

“I’m not in His Kingdom,” Krebs said.

“We are all of us in His Kingdom.”

Krebs felt embarrassed and resentful as always.

“I’ve worried about you so much, Harold,” his mother went on. “I know the temptations you must have been exposed to. I know how weak men are. I know what your own dear grandfather, my own father, told us about the Civil War and I have prayed for you. I pray for you all day long, Harold.”

Krebs looked at the bacon fat hardening on his plate.

“Your father is worried, too,” his mother went on. “He thinks you have lost your ambition, that you haven’t got a definite aim in life. Charley Simmons, who is just your age, has a good job and is going to be married. The boys are all settling down; they’re all determined to get somewhere; you can see that boys like Charley Simmons are on their way to being really a credit to the community.”

Krebs said nothing.

“Don’t look that way, Harold,” his mother said. “You know we love you and I want to tell you for your own good how matters stand. Your father does not want to hamper your freedom. He thinks you should be allowed to drive the car. If you want to take some of the nice girls out riding with you, we are only too pleased. We want you to enjoy yourself. But you are going to have to settle down to work, Harold. Your father doesn’t care what you start in at. All work is honorable as he says. But you’ve got to make a start at something. He asked me to speak to you this morning and then you can stop in and see him at his office.”

“Is that all?” Krebs said.

“Yes. Don’t you love your mother, dear boy?”

“No,” Krebs said.

His mother looked at him across the table. Her eyes were shiny. She started crying.

“I don’t love anybody,” Krebs said.

It wasn’t any good. He couldn’t tell her, he couldn’t make her see it. It was silly to have said it. He had only hurt her. He went over and took hold of her arm. She was crying with her head in her hands.

“I didn’t mean it,” he said. “I was just angry at something. I didn’t mean I didn’t love you.”

His mother went on crying. Krebs put his arm on her shoulder.

“Can’t you believe me, mother?”

His mother shook her head.

“Please, please, mother. Please believe me.”

“All right,” his mother said chokily. She looked up at him. “I believe you, Harold.”

Krebs kissed her hair. She put her face up to him.

“I’m your mother,” she said. “I held you next to my heart when you were a tiny baby.”

Krebs felt sick and vaguely nauseated.

“I know, Mummy,” he said. “I’ll try and be a good boy for you.”

“Would you kneel and pray with me, Harold?” his mother asked.

They knelt down beside the dining-room table and Krebs’s mother prayed.

“Now, you pray, Harold,” she said.

“I can’t,” Krebs said.

“Try, Harold.”

“I can’t.”

“Do you want me to pray for you?”

“Yes.”

So his mother prayed for him and then they stood up and Krebs kissed his mother and went out of the house. He had tried so to keep his life from being complicated. Still, none of it had touched him. He had felt sorry for his mother and she had made him lie. He would go to Kansas City and get a job and she would feel all right about it. There would be one more scene maybe before he got away. He would not go down to his father’s office. He would miss that one. He wanted his life to go smoothly. It had just gotten going that way. Well, that was all over now, anyway. He would go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball.

Study Questions

1. In the first paragraph, how is Krebs described?
2. What does Krebs do after he returns from the war?
3. In the last paragraph, how does Krebs feel?
4. Why do he go and watch his sister play baseball?
5. What are the two meanings of the title?

A Strange Story

O. Henry is the pen name of William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862–June 5, 1910), a famous American short story author. He worked as a pharmacist as a young man, later as a banker, then he was caught stealing from his own bank, and many of his short stories were written while he was locked up in prison. Many of his stories depict ordinary people and contain humor or irony. His most famous short story is *The Gift of the Magi* (1905).

A Strange Story

O. Henry
1881

In the northern part of Austin there once dwelt an honest family by the name of Smothers. The family consisted of John Smothers, his wife, himself, their little daughter, five years of age, and her parents, making six people toward the population of the city when counted for a special write-up, but only three by actual count.

One night after supper the little girl was seized with a severe colic, and John Smothers hurried down town to get some medicine.

He never came back.

The little girl recovered and in time grew up to womanhood.

The mother grieved very much over her husband's disappearance, and it was nearly three months before she married again, and moved to San Antonio.

The little girl also married in time, and after a few years had rolled around, she also had a little girl five years of age.

She still lived in the same house where they dwelt when her father had left and never returned.

One night by a remarkable coincidence her little girl was taken with cramp colic on the anniversary of the disappearance of John Smothers, who would now have been her grandfather if he had been alive and had a steady job.

"I will go downtown and get some medicine for her," said John Smith (for it was none other than he whom she had married).

"No, no, dear John," cried his wife. "You, too, might disappear forever, and then forget to come back."

So John Smith did not go, and together they sat by the bedside of little Pansy (for that was Pansy's name).

After a little Pansy seemed to grow worse, and John Smith again attempted to go for medicine, but his wife would not let him.

Suddenly the door opened, and an old man, stooped and bent, with long white hair, entered the room.

“Hello, here is grandpa,” said Pansy. She had recognized him before any of the others.

The old man drew a bottle of medicine from his pocket and gave Pansy a spoonful.

She got well immediately.

“I was a little late,” said John Smothers, “as I waited for a street car.”

Study Questions

1. What is the meaning of the first paragraph?
2. Why did John Smothers leave the house?
3. Do we know what happened to him?
4. In the end, what does he say caused his delay?
5. What genre is this?

After Twenty Years

O. Henry is the pen name of William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862–June 5, 1910), a famous American short story author. He worked as a pharmacist as a young man, later as a banker, then he was caught stealing from his own bank, and many of his short stories were written while he was locked up in prison. Many of his stories depict ordinary people and contain humor or irony. His most famous short story is *The Gift of the Magi* (1905).

After Twenty Years

O. Henry
1906

The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh de-peopled the streets.

Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye adown the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

"It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands—'Big Joe' Brady's restaurant."

"Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set.

"Twenty years ago to-night," said the man, "I dined here at 'Big Joe' Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

“It sounds pretty interesting,” said the policeman. “Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven’t you heard from your friend since you left?”

“Well, yes, for a time we corresponded,” said the other. “But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he’s alive, for he always was the truest, stanchest old chap in the world. He’ll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door to-night, and it’s worth it if my old partner turns up.”

The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

“Three minutes to ten,” he announced. “It was exactly ten o’clock when we parted here at the restaurant door.”

“Did pretty well out West, didn’t you?” asked the policeman.

“You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I’ve had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him.”

The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

“I’ll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?”

“I should say not!” said the other. “I’ll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he’ll be here by that time. So long, officer.”

“Good-night, sir,” said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

“Is that you, Bob?” he asked, doubtfully.

“Is that you, Jimmy Wells?” cried the man in the door.

“Bless my heart!” exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other’s hands with his own. “It’s Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I’d find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well!—twenty years is a long time. The old restaurant’s gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?”

“Bully; it has given me everything I asked it for. You’ve changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches.”

“Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty.”

“Doing well in New York, Jimmy?”

“Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we’ll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times.”

The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other’s face.

The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

“You’re not Jimmy Wells,” he snapped. “Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man’s nose from a Roman to a pug.”

“It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one,” said the tall man. “You’ve been under arrest for ten minutes, ‘Silky’ Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That’s sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here’s a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It’s from Patrolman Wells.”

The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck a match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn’t do it myself, so I went around and got a plain clothes man to do the job.

Jimmy.

Study Questions

1. Why was Jimmy twenty minutes late for the two men’s appointment?
2. Why does the tall policeman who walks with Bob wear his coat “up to his ears”?
3. What are the three big pieces of action at the end?
4. How well did Jimmy and Bob know each other?

The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry is the pen name of William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862–June 5, 1910), a famous American short story author. He worked as a pharmacist as a young man, later as a banker, then he was caught stealing from his own bank, and many of his short stories were written while he was locked up in prison. Many of his stories depict ordinary people and contain humor or irony. His most famous short story is *The Gift of the Magi* (1905).

The Gift of the Magi

O. Henry
1905

One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at $8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid $80 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to $20, the letters of "Dillingham" looked blurred, as though they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a grey cat walking a grey fence in a grey backyard. To-morrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only $1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only $1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honour of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an $8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a

rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its colour within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the Queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her, rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

“If Jim doesn’t kill me,” she said to herself, “before he takes a second look at me, he’ll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?”

At 7 o’clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying little silent prayers about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: “Please God, make him think I am still pretty.”

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

“Jim, darling,” she cried, “don’t look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold it because I couldn’t have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It’ll grow out again—you won’t mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say ‘Merry Christmas!’ Jim, and let’s be happy. You don’t know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I’ve got for you.”

“You’ve cut off your hair?” asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labour.

“Cut it off and sold it,” said Della. “Don’t you like me just as well, anyhow? I’m me without my hair, ain’t I?”

Jim looked about the room curiously.

“You say your hair is gone?” he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

“You needn’t look for it,” said Della. “It’s sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It’s Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered,” she went on with a sudden serious sweetness, “but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?”

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

“Don’t make any mistake, Dell,” he said, “about me. I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you’ll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first.”

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped for long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: “My hair grows so fast, Jim!”

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, “Oh, oh!”

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

“Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You’ll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.”

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

“Dell,” said he, “let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep ’em a while. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

Study Questions

1. Does the author end the story in a positive or negative way?
2. Were you happy for Della and Jim? Were you annoyed at them?
3. Why is so much time spent on Della and so little on Jim?
4. Consider the last paragraph. Does the story have a religious message?

5. Consider the paragraph containing the sentence, "Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer." What does the author mean?

The Last Leaf

O. Henry is the pen name of William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862–June 5, 1910), a famous American short story author. He worked as a pharmacist as a young man, later as a banker, then he was caught stealing from his own bank, and many of his short stories were written while he was locked up in prison. Many of his stories depict ordinary people and contain humor or irony. His most famous short story is *The Gift of the Magi* (1905).

The Last Leaf

O. Henry
1907

In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called “places.” These “places” make strange angles and curves. One street crosses itself a time or two. An artist once discovered a valuable possibility in this street. Suppose a collector with a bill for paints, paper and canvas should, in traversing this route, suddenly meet himself coming back, without a cent having been paid on account!

So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mugs and a chafing dish or two from Sixth avenue, and became a “colony.”

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue and Johnsy had their studio. “Johnsy” was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine; the other from California. They had met at the *table d’hote* of an Eighth street “Delmonico’s,” and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted.

That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia, stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy finger. Over on the east side this ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown “places.”

Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house.

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, gray eyebrow.

“She has one chance in—let us say, ten,” he said, as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. “And that chance is for her to want to live. This way people have of lining-up on the side of the undertaker makes the entire pharmacopeia look silly. Your little lady has made up her mind that she’s not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?”

“She—she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day,” said Sue.

“Paint?—bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking about twice—a man, for instance?”

“A man?” said Sue, with a jewsharp twang in her voice. “Is a man worth—but, no, doctor; there is nothing of the kind.”

“Well, it is the weakness, then,” said the doctor. “I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession I subtract 50 per cent. from the curative power of medicines. If you will get her to ask one question about the new winter styles in cloak sleeves I will promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one in ten.”

After the doctor had gone Sue went into the workroom and cried a Japanese napkin to a pulp. Then she swaggered into Johnsy’s room with her drawing board, whistling ragtime.

Johnsy lay, scarcely making a ripple under the bedclothes, with her face toward the window. Sue stopped whistling, thinking she was asleep.

She arranged her board and began a pen-and-ink drawing to illustrate a magazine story. Young artists must pave their way to Art by drawing pictures for magazine stories that young authors write to pave their way to Literature.

As Sue was sketching a pair of elegant horseshow riding trousers and a monocle on the figure of the hero, an Idaho cowboy, she heard a low sound, several times repeated. She went quickly to the bedside. Johnsy’s eyes were open wide. She was looking out the window and counting—counting backward.

“Twelve,” she said, and a little later “eleven;” and then “ten,” and “nine;” and then “eight” and “seven,” almost together.

Sue looked solicitously out the window. What was there to count? There was only a bare, dreary yard to be seen, and the blank side of the brick house twenty feet away. An old, old ivy vine, gnarled and decayed at the roots, climbed half way up the brick wall. The cold breath of autumn had stricken its leaves from the vine until its skeleton branches clung, almost bare, to the crumbling bricks.

“What is it, dear?” asked Sue.

“Six,” said Johnsy, in almost a whisper. “They’re falling faster now. Three days ago there were almost a hundred. It made my head ache to count them. But now it’s easy. There goes another one. There are only five left now.”

“Five what, dear. Tell your Sudie.”

“Leaves. On the ivy vine. When the last one falls I must go, too. I’ve known that for three days. Didn’t the doctor tell you?”

“Oh, I never heard of such nonsense,” complained Sue, with magnificent scorn. “What have old ivy leaves to do with your getting well? And you used to love that vine so, you naughty girl. Don’t be a goosey. Why, the doctor told me this morning that your chances for getting well real soon were—let’s see exactly what he said—he said the chances were ten to one! Why, that’s almost as good a chance as we have in New York when we ride on the street cars or walk past a new building. Try to take some broth now, and let Sudie go back to her drawing, so she can sell the editor man with it, and buy port wine for her sick child, and pork chops for her greedy self.”

You needn't get any more wine," said Johnsy, keeping her eyes fixed out the window. "There goes another. No, I don't want any broth. That leaves just four. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark. Then I'll go, too."

"Johnsy, dear," said Sue, bending over her, "will you promise me to keep your eyes closed, and not look out the window until I am done working? I must hand those drawings in by to-morrow. I need the light, or I would draw the shade down."

"Couldn't you draw in the other room?" asked Johnsy, coldly.

"I'd rather be here by you," said Sue. "Besides, I don't want you to keep looking at those silly ivy leaves."

"Tell me as soon as you have finished," said Johnsy, closing her eyes, and lying white and still as a fallen statue, "because I want to see the last one fall. I'm tired of waiting. I'm tired of thinking. I want to turn loose my hold on everything, and go sailing down, down, just like one of those poor, tired leaves."

"Try to sleep," said Sue. "I must call Behrman up to be my model for the old hermit miner. I'll not be gone a minute. Don't try to move 'till I come back."

Old Behrman was a painter who lived on the ground floor beneath them. He was past sixty and had a Michael Angelo's Moses beard curling down from the head of a satyr along the body of an imp. Behrman was a failure in art. Forty years he had wielded the brush without getting near enough to touch the hem of his Mistress's robe. He had been always about to paint a masterpiece, but had never yet begun it. For several years he had painted nothing except now and then a daub in the line of commerce or advertising. He earned a little by serving as a model to those young artists in the colony who could not pay the price of a professional. He drank gin to excess, and still talked of his coming masterpiece. For the rest he was a fierce little old man, who scoffed terribly at softness in any one, and who regarded himself es especial 'mastiff-in-waiting to protect the two young artists in the studio above.

Sue found Behrman smelling strongly of juniper berries in his dimly lighted den below. In one corner was a blank canvas on an easel that had been waiting there for twenty-five years to receive the first line of the masterpiece. She told him of Johnsy's fancy, and how she feared she would, indeed, light and fragile as a leaf herself, float away when her slight hold upon the world grew weaker.

Old Behrman, with his red eyes plainly streaming, shouted his contempt and derision for such idiotic imaginings.

"Vass!" he cried. "Is dere people in de world mit der foolishness to die because leafs dey drop off from a confounded vine? I haf not heard of such a thing. No, I vill not bose as a model for your fool hermit-dunderhead. Vy do you allow dot silly, pusiness to come in der prain of her? Ach, dot poor lettle Miss Johnsy."

"She is very ill and weak," said Sue, "and the fever has left her mind morbid and full of strange fancies. Very well, Mr. Behrman, if you do not care to pose for me, you needn't. But I think you are a horrid old—old flibbertigibbet."

"You are just like a woman!" yelled Behrman. "Who said I vill not bose? Go on. I come mit you. For half an hour I haf peen trying to say dot I am ready to bose. Gott! dis is not any blace in which one so goot as Miss Yohnsy shall lie sick. Some day I vill baint a masterpiece, and ve shall all go avay. Gott! yes."

Johnsy was sleeping when they went upstairs. Sue pulled the shade down to the window-sill, and motioned Behrman into the other room. In there they peered out the window fearfully at the ivy vine.

Then, they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. A persistent, cold rain was falling, mingled with snow. Behrman, in his old blue shirt, took his seat as the hermit-miner on an upturned kettle for a rock.

When Sue awoke from an hour's sleep the next morning she found Johnsy with dull, wide-open eyes staring at the drawn green shade.

"Pull it up; I want to see," she ordered, in a whisper.

Wearily Sue obeyed.

But, lo! after the beating rain and fierce gusts of wind that had endured through the livelong night, there yet stood out against the brick wall one ivy leaf. It was the last on the vine. Still dark green near its stem, but with its serrated edges tinted with the yellow of dissolution and decay, it hung bravely from a branch some twenty feet above the ground.

"It is the last one," said Johnsy. "I thought it would surely fall during the night. I heard the wind. It will fall to-day, and I shall die at the same time."

"Dear, dear!" said Sue, leaning her worn face down to the pillow, "think of me, if you won't think of yourself. What would I do?"

But Johnsy did not answer. The lonesomest thing in all the world is a soul when it is making ready to go on its mysterious, far journey. The fancy seemed to possess her more strongly as one by one the ties that bound her to friendship and to earth were loosed.

The day wore away, and even through the twilight they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall. And then, with the coming of the night, the north wind was again loosed, while the rain still beat against the windows and pattered down from the low Dutch eaves.

When it was light enough Johnsy, the merciless, commanded that the shade be raised.

The ivy leaf was still there.

Johnsy lay for a long time looking at it. And then she called to Sue, who was stirring her chicken broth over the gas stove.

"I've been a bad girl, Sudie," said Johnsy. "Something has made that last leaf stay there to show me how wicked I was. It is a sin to want to die. You may bring me a little broth now, and some milk with a little port in it, and—no; bring me a handmirror first; and then pack some pillows about me, and I will sit up and watch you cook."

An hour later she said.

"Sudie, some day I hope to paint the Bay of Naples."

The doctor came in the afternoon, and Sue had an excuse to go into the hallway as he left.

"Even chances," said the doctor, taking Sue's thin, shaking hand in his. "With good nursing you'll win. And now I must see another case I have downstairs. Behrman, his name is—some kind of an artist, I believe. Pneumonia, too. He is an old, weak man, and

the attack is acute. There is no hope for him; but he goes to the hospital to-day to be made more comfortable."

The next day the doctor said to Sue: "She's out of danger. You've won. Nutrition and care now—that's all."

And that afternoon Sue came to the bed where Johnsy lay, contentedly knitting a very blue and very useless woolen shoulder scarf, and put one arm around her, pillows and all.

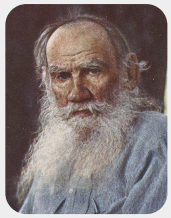
"I have something to tell you, white mouse," she said. "Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia to-day in the hospital. He was ill only two days. The janitor found him on the morning of the first day in his room downstairs helpless with pain. His shoes and clothing were wet through and icy cold. They couldn't imagine where he had been on such a dreadful night. And then they found a lantern, still lighted, and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and some scattered brushes, and a palette with green and yellow colors mixed on it, and—look out the window, dear, at the last ivy leaf on the wall. Didn't you wonder why it never fluttered or moved when the wind blew? Ah, darling, it's Behrman's masterpiece—he painted it there the night that the last leaf fell."

Study Questions

1. How are Johnsy and Sue related?
2. What disease does Johnsy have?
3. When does she think she'll die?
4. Who is Behrman?
5. What is his dream?

How Much Land Does a Man Need?

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (September 9, 1828–November 20, 1910), commonly known as Leo Tolstoy, was a Russian author and is said to be one of the most influential writers in history. Tolstoy wrote plays, essays on philosophical and religious themes, and many books. Two of his most famous books are *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*. Despite multiple nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Nobel Peace Prize, he never received either award.



How Much Land Does a Man Need?

Leo Tolstoy
1886

Translated by the Maudes

I

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a tradesman in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat over their tea talking, the elder began to boast of the advantages of town life: saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theater, promenades, and entertainments.

The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a tradesman, and stood up for that of a peasant.

‘I would not change my way of life for yours,’ said she. ‘We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn more than you need, you are very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, “Loss and gain are brothers twain.” It often happens that people who are wealthy one day are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant’s life is not a fat one, it is a long one. We shall never grow rich, but we shall always have enough to eat.’

The elder sister said sneeringly:

‘Enough? Yes, if you like to share with the pigs and the calves! What do you know of elegance or manners! However much your good man may slave, you will die as you are living—on a dung heap—and your children the same.’

‘Well, what of that?’ replied the younger. ‘Of course our work is rough and coarse. But, on the other hand, it is sure; and we need not bow to any one. But you, in your towns, are surrounded by temptations; to-day all may be right, but to-morrow the Evil One may tempt your husband with cards, wine, or women, and all will go to ruin. Don’t such things happen often enough?’

Pahóm, the master of the house, was lying on the top of the oven, and he listened to the women’s chatter.

‘It is perfectly true,’ thought he. ‘Busy as we are from childhood tilling mother earth, we peasants have no time to let any nonsense settle in our heads. Our only trouble is that we haven’t land enough. If I had plenty of land, I shouldn’t fear the Devil himself!’

The women finished their tea, chatted a while about dress, and then cleared away the tea-things and lay down to sleep.

But the Devil had been sitting behind the oven, and had heard all that was said. He was pleased that the peasant’s wife had led her husband into boasting, and that he had said that if he had plenty of land he would not fear the Devil himself.

‘All right,’ thought the Devil. ‘We will have a tussle. I’ll give you land enough; and by means of that land I will get you into my power.’

II

Close to the village there lived a lady, a small landowner, who had an estate of about three hundred acres[1]. She had always lived on good terms with the peasants, until she engaged as her steward an old soldier, who took to burdening the people with fines. However careful Pahóm tried to be, it happened again and again that now a horse of his got among the lady’s oats, now a cow strayed into her garden, now his calves found their way into her meadows—and he always had to pay a fine.

Pahóm paid, but grumbled, and, going home in a temper, was rough with his family. All through that summer, Pahóm had much trouble because of this steward; and he was even glad when winter came and the cattle had to be stabled. Though he grudged the fodder when they could no longer graze on the pasture-land, at least he was free from anxiety about them.

In the winter the news got about that the lady was going to sell her land, and that the keeper of the inn on the high road was bargaining for it. When the peasants heard this they were very much alarmed.

‘Well,’ thought they, ‘if the innkeeper gets the land, he will worry us with fines worse than the lady’s steward. We all depend on that estate.’

So the peasants went on behalf of their Commune, and asked the lady not to sell the land to the innkeeper; offering her a better price for it themselves. The lady agreed to let them have it. Then the peasants tried to arrange for the Commune to buy the whole estate, so that it might be held by all in common. They met twice to discuss it, but could not settle the matter; the Evil One sowed discord among them, and they could not agree. So they decided to buy the land individually, each according to his means; and the lady agreed to this plan as she had to the other.

Presently Pahóm heard that a neighbor of his was buying fifty acres, and that the lady had consented to accept one half in cash and to wait a year for the other half. Pahóm felt envious.

‘Look at that,’ thought he, ‘the land is all being sold, and I shall get none of it.’ So he spoke to his wife.

‘Other people are buying,’ said he, ‘and we must also buy twenty acres or so. Life is becoming impossible. That steward is simply crushing us with his fines.’

So they put their heads together and considered how they could manage to buy it. They had one hundred rubles laid by. They sold a colt, and one half of their bees; hired out one

of their sons as a laborer, and took his wages in advance; borrowed the rest from a brother-in-law, and so scraped together half the purchase money.

Having done this, Pahóm chose out a farm of forty acres, some of it wooded, and went to the lady to bargain for it. They came to an agreement, and he shook hands with her upon it, and paid her a deposit in advance. Then they went to town and signed the deeds; he paying half the price down, and undertaking to pay the remainder within two years.

So now Pahóm had land of his own. He borrowed seed, and sowed it on the land he had bought. The harvest was a good one, and within a year he had managed to pay off his debts both to the lady and to his brother-in-law. So he became a landowner, plowing and sowing his own land, making hay on his own land, cutting his own trees, and feeding his cattle on his own pasture. When he went out to plow his fields, or to look at his growing corn, or at his grass-meadows, his heart would fill with joy. The grass that grew and the flowers that bloomed there, seemed to him unlike any that grew elsewhere. Formerly, when he had passed by that land, it had appeared the same as any other land, but now it seemed quite different.

III

So Pahóm was well contented, and everything would have been right if the neighboring peasants would only not have trespassed on his corn-fields and meadows. He appealed to them most civilly, but they still went on: now the Communal herdsmen would let the village cows stray into his meadows; then horses from the night pasture would get among his corn. Pahóm turned them out again and again, and forgave their owners, and for a long time he forbore from prosecuting any one. But at last he lost patience and complained to the District Court. He knew it was the peasants' want of land, and no evil intent on their part, that caused the trouble; but he thought:

'I cannot go on overlooking it, or they will destroy all I have. They must be taught a lesson.'

So he had them up, gave them one lesson, and then another, and two or three of the peasants were fined. After a time Pahóm's neighbors began to bear him a grudge for this, and would now and then let their cattle on to his land on purpose. One peasant even got into Pahóm's wood at night and cut down five young lime trees for their bark. Pahóm passing through the wood one day noticed something white. He came nearer, and saw the stripped trunks lying on the ground, and close by stood the stumps, where the tree had been. Pahóm was furious.

'If he had only cut one here and there it would have been bad enough,' thought Pahóm, 'but the rascal has actually cut down a whole clump. If I could only find out who did this, I would pay him out.'

He racked his brains as to who it could be. Finally he decided: 'It must be Simon—no one else could have done it.' So he went to Simon's homestead to have a look round, but he found nothing, and only had an angry scene. However, he now felt more certain than ever that Simon had done it, and he lodged a complaint. Simon was summoned. The case was tried, and re-tried, and at the end of it all Simon was acquitted, there being no evidence against him. Pahóm felt still more aggrieved, and let his anger loose upon the Elder and the Judges.

'You let thieves grease your palms,' said he. 'If you were honest folk yourselves, you would not let a thief go free.'

So Pahóm quarreled with the Judges and with his neighbors. Threats to burn his building began to be uttered. So though Pahóm had more land, his place in the Commune was much worse than before.

About this time a rumor got about that many people were moving to new parts.

'There's no need for me to leave my land,' thought Pahóm. 'But some of the others might leave our village, and then there would be more room for us. I would take over their land myself, and make my estate a bit bigger. I could then live more at ease. As it is, I am still too cramped to be comfortable.'

One day Pahóm was sitting at home, when a peasant passing through the village, happened to call in. He was allowed to stay the night, and supper was given him. Pahóm had a talk with this peasant and asked him where he came from. The stranger answered that he came from beyond the Volga, where he had been working. One word led to another, and the man went on to say that many people were settling in those parts. He told how some people from his village had settled there. They had joined the Commune, and had had twenty-five acres per man granted them. The land was so good, he said, that the rye sown on it grew as high as a horse, and so thick that five cuts of a sickle made a sheaf. One peasant, he said, had brought nothing with him but his bare hands, and now he had six horses and two cows of his own.

Pahóm's heart kindled with desire. He thought:

'Why should I suffer in this narrow hole, if one can live so well elsewhere? I will sell my land and my homestead here, and with the money I will start afresh over there and get everything new. In this crowded place one is always having trouble. But I must first go and find out all about it myself.'

Towards summer he got ready and started. He went down the Volga on a steamer to Samára, then walked another three hundred miles on foot, and at last reached the place. It was just as the stranger had said. The peasants had plenty of land: every man had twenty-five acres of Communal land given him for his use, and any one who had money could buy, besides, at two shillings an acre[2] as much good freehold land as he wanted.

Having found out all he wished to know, Pahóm returned home as autumn came on, and began selling off his belongings. He sold his land at a profit, sold his homestead and all his cattle, and withdrew from membership of the Commune. He only waited till the spring, and then started with his family for the new settlement.

IV

As soon as Pahóm and his family arrived at their new abode, he applied for admission into the Commune of a large village. He stood treat to the Elders, and obtained the necessary documents. Five shares of Communal land were given him for his own and his sons' use: that is to say—125 acres (not all together, but in different fields) besides the use of the Communal pasture. Pahóm put up the buildings he needed, and bought cattle. Of the Communal land alone he had three times as much as at his former home, and the land was good corn-land. He was ten times better off than he had been. He had plenty of arable land and pasturage, and could keep as many head of cattle as he liked.

At first, in the bustle of building and settling down, Pahóm was pleased with it all, but when he got used to it he began to think that even here he had not enough land. The first year, he sowed wheat on his share of the Communal land, and had a good crop. He wanted to go on sowing wheat, but had not enough Communal land for the purpose, and

what he had already used was not available; for in those parts wheat is only sown on virgin soil or on fallow land. It is sown for one or two years, and then the land lies fallow till it is again overgrown with prairie grass. There were many who wanted such land, and there was not enough for all; so that people quarreled about it. Those who were better off, wanted it for growing wheat, and those who were poor, wanted it to let to dealers, so that they might raise money to pay their taxes. Pahóm wanted to sow more wheat; so he rented land from a dealer for a year. He sowed much wheat and had a fine crop, but the land was too far from the village—the wheat had to be carted more than ten miles. After a time Pahóm noticed that some peasant-dealers were living on separate farms, and were growing wealthy; and he thought:

'If I were to buy some freehold land, and have a homestead on it, it would be a different thing, altogether. Then it would all be nice and compact.'

The question of buying freehold land recurred to him again and again.

He went on in the same way for three years; renting land and sowing wheat. The seasons turned out well and the crops were good, so that he began to lay money by. He might have gone on living contentedly, but he grew tired of having to rent other people's land every year, and having to scramble for it. Wherever there was good land to be had, the peasants would rush for it and it was taken up at once, so that unless you were sharp about it you got none. It happened in the third year that he and a dealer together rented a piece of pasture land from some peasants; and they had already plowed it up, when there was some dispute, and the peasants went to law about it, and things fell out so that the labor was all lost.

'If it were my own land,' thought Pahóm, 'I should be independent, and there would not be all this unpleasantness.'

So Pahóm began looking out for land which he could buy; and he came across a peasant who had bought thirteen hundred acres, but having got into difficulties was willing to sell again cheap. Pahóm bargained and haggled with him, and at last they settled the price at 1,500 rubles, part in cash and part to be paid later. They had all but clinched the matter, when a passing dealer happened to stop at Pahóm's one day to get a feed for his horse. He drank tea with Pahóm, and they had a talk. The dealer said that he was just returning from the land of the Bashkírs, far away, where he had bought thirteen thousand acres of land all for 1,000 rubles. Pahóm questioned him further, and the tradesman said:

'All one need do is to make friends with the chiefs. I gave away about one hundred rubles' worth of dressing-gowns and carpets, besides a case of tea, and I gave wine to those who would drink it; and I got the land for less than twopence an acre[3]. And he showed Pahóm the title-deeds, saying:

'The land lies near a river, and the whole prairie is virgin soil.'

Pahóm plied him with questions, and the tradesman said:

'There is more land there than you could cover if you walked a year, and it all belongs to the Bashkírs. They are as simple as sheep, and land can be got almost for nothing.'

'There now,' thought Pahóm, 'with my one thousand rubles, why should I get only thirteen hundred acres, and saddle myself with a debt besides? If I take it out there, I can get more than ten times as much for the money.'

V

Pahóm inquired how to get to the place, and as soon as the tradesman had left him, he prepared to go there himself. He left his wife to look after the homestead, and started on his journey taking his man with him. They stopped at a town on their way, and bought a case of tea, some wine, and other presents, as the tradesman had advised. On and on they went until they had gone more than three hundred miles, and on the seventh day they came to a place where the Bashkírs had pitched their tents. It was all just as the tradesman had said. The people lived on the steppes, by a river, in felt-covered tents[4]. They neither tilled the ground, nor ate bread. Their cattle and horses grazed in herds on the steppe. The colts were tethered behind the tents, and the mares were driven to them twice a day. The mares were milked, and from the milk kumiss was made. It was the women who prepared kumiss, and they also made cheese. As far as the men were concerned, drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton, and playing on their pipes, was all they cared about. They were all stout and merry, and all the summer long they never thought of doing any work. They were quite ignorant, and knew no Russian, but were good-natured enough.

As soon as they saw Pahóm, they came out of their tents and gathered round their visitor. An interpreter was found, and Pahóm told them he had come about some land. The Bashkírs seemed very glad; they took Pahóm and led him into one of the best tents, where they made him sit on some down cushions placed on a carpet, while they sat round him. They gave him tea and kumiss, and had a sheep killed, and gave him mutton to eat. Pahóm took presents out of his cart and distributed them among the Bashkírs, and divided among them the tea. The Bashkírs were delighted. They talked a great deal among themselves, and then told the interpreter to translate.

‘They wish to tell you,’ said the interpreter, ‘that they like you, and that it is our custom to do all we can to please a guest and to repay him for his gifts. You have given us presents, now tell us which of the things we possess please you best, that we may present them to you.’

‘What pleases me best here,’ answered Pahóm, ‘is your land. Our land is crowded, and the soil is exhausted; but you have plenty of land and it is good land. I never saw the like of it.’

The interpreter translated. The Bashkírs talked among themselves for a while. Pahóm could not understand what they were saying, but saw that they were much amused, and that they shouted and laughed. Then they were silent and looked at Pahóm while the interpreter said:

‘They wish me to tell you that in return for your presents they will gladly give you as much land as you want. You have only to point it out with your hand and it is yours.’

The Bashkírs talked again for a while and began to dispute. Pahóm asked what they were disputing about, and the interpreter told him that some of them thought they ought to ask their Chief about the land and not act in his absence, while others thought there was no need to wait for his return.

VI

While the Bashkírs were disputing, a man in a large fox-fur cap appeared on the scene. They all became silent and rose to their feet. The interpreter said, ‘This is our Chief himself.’

Pahóm immediately fetched the best dressing-gown and five pounds of tea, and offered these to the Chief. The Chief accepted them, and seated himself in the place of honor. The

Bashkírs at once began telling him something. The Chief listened for a while, then made a sign with his head for them to be silent, and addressing himself to Pahóm, said in Russian:

'Well, let it be so. Choose whatever piece of land you like; we have plenty of it.'

'How can I take as much as I like?' thought Pahóm. 'I must get a deed to make it secure, or else they may say, "It is yours," and afterwards may take it away again.'

'Thank you for your kind words,' he said aloud. 'You have much land, and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure which bit is mine. Could it not be measured and made over to me? Life and death are in God's hands. You good people give it to me, but your children might wish to take it away again.'

'You are quite right,' said the Chief. 'We will make it over to you.'

'I heard that a dealer had been here,' continued Pahóm, 'and that you gave him a little land, too, and signed title-deeds to that effect. I should like to have it done in the same way.'

The Chief understood.

'Yes,' replied he, 'that can be done quite easily. We have a scribe, and we will go to town with you and have the deed properly sealed.'

'And what will be the price?' asked Pahóm.

'Our price is always the same: one thousand rubles a day.'

Pahóm did not understand.

'A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?'

'We do not know how to reckon it out,' said the Chief. 'We sell it by the day. As much as you can go round on your feet in a day is yours, and the price is one thousand rubles a day.'

Pahóm was surprised.

'But in a day you can get round a large tract of land,' he said.

The Chief laughed.

'It will all be yours!' said he. 'But there is one condition: If you don't return on the same day to the spot whence you started, your money is lost.'

'But how am I to mark the way that I have gone?'

'Why, we shall go to any spot you like, and stay there. You must start from that spot and make your round, taking a spade with you. Wherever you think necessary, make a mark. At every turning, dig a hole and pile up the turf; then afterwards we will go round with a plow from hole to hole. You may make as large a circuit as you please, but before the sun sets you must return to the place you started from. All the land you cover will be yours.'

Pahóm was delighted. It was decided to start early next morning. They talked a while, and after drinking some more kumiss and eating some more mutton, they had tea again, and then the night came on. They gave Pahóm a feather-bed to sleep on, and the Bashkírs

dispersed for the night, promising to assemble the next morning at daybreak and ride out before sunrise to the appointed spot.

VII

Pahóm lay on the feather-bed, but could not sleep. He kept thinking about the land.

'What a large tract I will mark off!' thought he. 'I can easily do thirty-five miles in a day. The days are long now, and within a circuit of thirty-five miles what a lot of land there will be! I will sell the poorer land, or let it to peasants, but I'll pick out the best and farm it. I will buy two ox-teams, and hire two more laborers. About a hundred and fifty acres shall be plow-land, and I will pasture cattle on the rest.'

Pahóm lay awake all night, and dozed off only just before dawn. Hardly were his eyes closed when he had a dream. He thought he was lying in that same tent, and heard somebody chuckling outside. He wondered who it could be, and rose and went out, and he saw the Bashkír Chief sitting in front of the tent holding his side and rolling about with laughter. Going nearer to the Chief, Pahóm asked: 'What are you laughing at?' But he saw that it was no longer the Chief, but the dealer who had recently stopped at his house and had told him about the land. Just as Pahóm was going to ask, 'Have you been here long?' he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga, long ago, to Pahóm's old home. Then he saw that it was not the peasant either, but the Devil himself with hoofs and horns, sitting there and chuckling, and before him lay a man barefoot, prostrate on the ground, with only trousers and a shirt on. And Pahóm dreamed that he looked more attentively to see what sort of a man it was lying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself! He awoke horror-struck.

'What things one does dream,' thought he.

Looking round he saw through the open door that the dawn was breaking.

'It's time to wake them up,' thought he. 'We ought to be starting.'

He got up, roused his man (who was sleeping in his cart), bade him harness; and went to call the Bashkírs.

'It's time to go to the steppe to measure the land,' he said.

The Bashkírs rose and assembled, and the Chief came, too. Then they began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pahóm some tea, but he would not wait.

'If we are to go, let us go. It is high time,' said he.

VIII

The Bashkírs got ready and they all started: some mounted on horses, and some in carts. Pahóm drove in his own small cart with his servant, and took a spade with him. When they reached the steppe, the morning red was beginning to kindle. They ascended a hillock (called by the Bashkírs a shikhan) and dismounting from their carts and their horses, gathered in one spot. The Chief came up to Pahóm and stretched out his arm towards the plain:

'See,' said he, 'all this, as far as your eye can reach, is ours. You may have any part of it you like.'

Pahóm's eyes glistened: it was all virgin soil, as flat as the palm of your hand, as black as the seed of a poppy, and in the hollows different kinds of grasses grew breast high.

The Chief took off his fox-fur cap, placed it on the ground and said:

'This will be the mark. Start from here, and return here again. All the land you go round shall be yours.'

Pahóm took out his money and put it on the cap. Then he took off his outer coat, remaining in his sleeveless under coat. He unfastened his girdle and tied it tight below his stomach, put a little bag of bread into the breast of his coat, and tying a flask of water to his girdle, he drew up the tops of his boots, took the spade from his man, and stood ready to start. He considered for some moments which way he had better go—it was tempting everywhere.

'No matter,' he concluded, 'I will go towards the rising sun.'

He turned his face to the east, stretched himself, and waited for the sun to appear above the rim.

'I must lose no time,' he thought, 'and it is easier walking while it is still cool.'

The sun's rays had hardly flashed above the horizon, before Pahóm, carrying the spade over his shoulder, went down into the steppe.

Pahóm started walking neither slowly nor quickly. After having gone a thousand yards he stopped, dug a hole, and placed pieces of turf one on another to make it more visible. Then he went on; and now that he had walked off his stiffness he quickened his pace. After a while he dug another hole.

Pahóm looked back. The hillock could be distinctly seen in the sunlight, with the people on it, and the glittering tires of the cartwheels. At a rough guess Pahóm concluded that he had walked three miles. It was growing warmer; he took off his under-coat, flung it across his shoulder, and went on again. It had grown quite warm now; he looked at the sun, it was time to think of breakfast.

'The first shift is done, but there are four in a day, and it is too soon yet to turn. But I will just take off my boots,' said he to himself.

He sat down, took off his boots, stuck them into his girdle, and went on. It was easy walking now.

'I will go on for another three miles,' thought he, 'and then turn to the left. The spot is so fine, that it would be a pity to lose it. The further one goes, the better the land seems.'

He went straight on for a while, and when he looked round, the hillock was scarcely visible and the people on it looked like black ants, and he could just see something glistening there in the sun.

'Ah,' thought Pahóm, 'I have gone far enough in this direction, it is time to turn. Besides I am in a regular sweat, and very thirsty.'

He stopped, dug a large hole, and heaped up pieces of turf. Next he untied his flask, had a drink, and then turned sharply to the left. He went on and on; the grass was high, and it was very hot.

Pahóm began to grow tired: he looked at the sun and saw that it was noon.

‘Well,’ he thought, ‘I must have a rest.’

He sat down, and ate some bread and drank some water; but he did not lie down, thinking that if he did he might fall asleep. After sitting a little while, he went on again. At first he walked easily: the food had strengthened him; but it had become terribly hot, and he felt sleepy; still he went on, thinking: ‘An hour to suffer, a life-time to live.’

He went a long way in this direction also, and was about to turn to the left again, when he perceived a damp hollow: ‘It would be a pity to leave that out,’ he thought. ‘Flax would do well there.’ So he went on past the hollow, and dug a hole on the other side of it before he turned the corner. Pahóm looked towards the hillock. The heat made the air hazy: it seemed to be quivering, and through the haze the people on the hillock could scarcely be seen.

‘Ah!’ thought Pahóm, ‘I have made the sides too long; I must make this one shorter.’ And he went along the third side, stepping faster. He looked at the sun: it was nearly half way to the horizon, and he had not yet done two miles of the third side of the square. He was still ten miles from the goal.

‘No,’ he thought, ‘though it will make my land lop-sided, I must hurry back in a straight line now. I might go too far, and as it is I have a great deal of land.’

So Pahóm hurriedly dug a hole, and turned straight towards the hillock.

IX

Pahóm went straight towards the hillock, but he now walked with difficulty. He was done up with the heat, his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs began to fail. He longed to rest, but it was impossible if he meant to get back before sunset. The sun waits for no man, and it was sinking lower and lower.

‘Oh dear,’ he thought, ‘if only I have not blundered trying for too much! What if I am too late?’

He looked towards the hillock and at the sun. He was still far from his goal, and the sun was already near the rim.

Pahóm walked on and on; it was very hard walking, but he went quicker and quicker. He pressed on, but was still far from the place. He began running, threw away his coat, his boots, his flask, and his cap, and kept only the spade which he used as a support.

‘What shall I do,’ he thought again, ‘I have grasped too much, and ruined the whole affair. I can’t get there before the sun sets.’

And this fear made him still more breathless. Pahóm went on running, his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him, and his mouth was parched. His breast was working like a blacksmith’s bellows, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were giving way as if they did not belong to him. Pahóm was seized with terror lest he should die of the strain.

Though afraid of death, he could not stop. ‘After having run all that way they will call me a fool if I stop now,’ thought he. And he ran on and on, and drew near and heard the Bashkírs yelling and shouting to him, and their cries inflamed his heart still more. He gathered his last strength and ran on.

The sun was close to the rim, and cloaked in mist looked large, and red as blood. Now, yes now, it was about to set! The sun was quite low, but he was also quite near his aim. Pahóm could already see the people on the hillock waving their arms to hurry him up. He could see the fox-fur cap on the ground, and the money on it, and the Chief sitting on the ground holding his sides. And Pahóm remembered his dream.

'There is plenty of land,' thought he, 'but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life, I have lost my life! I shall never reach that spot!'

Pahóm looked at the sun, which had reached the earth: one side of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hillock it suddenly grew dark. He looked up—the sun had already set. He gave a cry: 'All my labor has been in vain,' thought he, and was about to stop, but he heard the Bashkírs still shouting, and remembered that though to him, from below, the sun seemed to have set, they on the hillock could still see it. He took a long breath and ran up the hillock. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. Before it sat the Chief laughing and holding his sides. Again Pahóm remembered his dream, and he uttered a cry: his legs gave way beneath him, he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

'Ah, what a fine fellow!' exclaimed the Chief. 'He has gained much land!'

Pahóm's servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahóm was dead!

The Bashkírs clicked their tongues to show their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahóm to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.

❊

1. 120 *desyatins*. The *desyatina* is properly 2.7 acres; but in this story round numbers are used.
2. Three rubles per *desyatina*.
3. Five kopecks for a *desyatina*.
4. *Kibitkas*, as described in footnote on p. 171.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Study Questions

1. Who gave Pahóm the idea to obtain more land?
2. In Part 3, Pahóm is angry about neighboring peasants trespassing. Why is this hypocritical? Does he recognize the hypocrisy?
3. The story has nine sections. Where does the major action occur?
4. What personality trait is the focus of the entire story?

2BR02B

Kurt Vonnegut (November 11, 1922–April 11, 2007) was an American writer. His writing is known for its satirical humor, and over the decades he published fourteen novels, several nonfiction books, five plays, and a large number of short stories. Two of his most famous books are *Cat's Cradle* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the latter of which is partly based on his own experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II.

2BR02B

Kurt Vonnegut
1962

Everything was perfectly swell.

There were no prisons, no slums, no insane asylums, no cripples, no poverty, no wars.

All diseases were conquered. So was old age.

Death, barring accidents, was an adventure for volunteers.

The population of the United States was stabilized at forty-million souls.

One bright morning in the Chicago Lying-in Hospital, a man named Edward K. Wehling, Jr., waited for his wife to give birth. He was the only man waiting. Not many people were born a day any more.

Wehling was fifty-six, a mere stripling in a population whose average age was one hundred and twenty-nine.

X-rays had revealed that his wife was going to have triplets. The children would be his first.

Young Wehling was hunched in his chair, his head in his hand. He was so rumpled, so still and colorless as to be virtually invisible. His camouflage was perfect, since the waiting room had a disorderly and demoralized air, too. Chairs and ashtrays had been moved away from the walls. The floor was paved with spattered dropcloths.

The room was being redecorated. It was being redecorated as a memorial to a man who had volunteered to die.

A sardonic old man, about two hundred years old, sat on a stepladder, painting a mural he did not like. Back in the days when people aged visibly, his age would have been guessed at thirty-five or so. Aging had touched him that much before the cure for aging was found.

The mural he was working on depicted a very neat garden. Men and women in white, doctors and nurses, turned the soil, planted seedlings, sprayed bugs, spread fertilizer.

Men and women in purple uniforms pulled up weeds, cut down plants that were old and sickly, raked leaves, carried refuse to trash-burners.

Never, never, never—not even in medieval Holland nor old Japan—had a garden been more formal, been better tended. Every plant had all the loam, light, water, air and nourishment it could use.

A hospital orderly came down the corridor, singing under his breath a popular song:

If you don't like my kisses, honey,
Here's what I will do:
I'll go see a girl in purple,
Kiss this sad world toodle-oo.
If you don't want my lovin',
Why should I take up all this space?
I'll get off this old planet,
Let some sweet baby have my place.

The orderly looked in at the mural and the muralist. "Looks so real," he said, "I can practically imagine I'm standing in the middle of it."

"What makes you think you're not in it?" said the painter. He gave a satiric smile. "It's called 'The Happy Garden of Life,' you know."

"That's good of Dr. Hitz," said the orderly.

◈ ◈ ◈

He was referring to one of the male figures in white, whose head was a portrait of Dr. Benjamin Hitz, the hospital's Chief Obstetrician. Hitz was a blindingly handsome man.

"Lot of faces still to fill in," said the orderly. He meant that the faces of many of the figures in the mural were still blank. All blanks were to be filled with portraits of important people on either the hospital staff or from the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Termination.

"Must be nice to be able to make pictures that look like something," said the orderly.

The painter's face curdled with scorn. "You think I'm proud of this daub?" he said. "You think this is my idea of what life really looks like?"

"What's your idea of what life looks like?" said the orderly.

The painter gestured at a foul dropcloth. "There's a good picture of it," he said. "Frame that, and you'll have a picture a damn sight more honest than this one."

"You're a gloomy old duck, aren't you?" said the orderly.

"Is that a crime?" said the painter.

The orderly shrugged. "If you don't like it here, Grandpa—" he said, and he finished the thought with the trick telephone number that people who didn't want to live any more were supposed to call. The zero in the telephone number he pronounced "naught."

The number was: "2 B R 0 2 B."

It was the telephone number of an institution whose fanciful sobriquets included: "Automat," "Birdland," "Cannery," "Catbox," "De-louser," "Easy-go," "Good-by, Mother," "Happy Hooligan," "Kiss-me-quick," "Lucky Pierre," "Sheepdip," "Waring Blendor," "Weep-no-more" and "Why Worry?"

“To be or not to be” was the telephone number of the municipal gas chambers of the Federal Bureau of Termination.

◈ ◈ ◈

The painter thumbed his nose at the orderly. “When I decide it’s time to go,” he said, “it won’t be at the Sheepdip.”

“A do-it-yourselfer, eh?” said the orderly. “Messy business, Grandpa. Why don’t you have a little consideration for the people who have to clean up after you?”

The painter expressed with an obscenity his lack of concern for the tribulations of his survivors. “The world could do with a good deal more mess, if you ask me,” he said.

The orderly laughed and moved on.

Wehling, the waiting father, mumbled something without raising his head. And then he fell silent again.

A coarse, formidable woman strode into the waiting room on spike heels. Her shoes, stockings, trench coat, bag and overseas cap were all purple, the purple the painter called “the color of grapes on Judgment Day.”

The medallion on her purple musette bag was the seal of the Service Division of the Federal Bureau of Termination, an eagle perched on a turnstile.

The woman had a lot of facial hair—an unmistakable mustache, in fact. A curious thing about gas-chamber hostesses was that, no matter how lovely and feminine they were when recruited, they all sprouted mustaches within five years or so.

“Is this where I’m supposed to come?” she said to the painter.

“A lot would depend on what your business was,” he said. “You aren’t about to have a baby, are you?”

“They told me I was supposed to pose for some picture,” she said. “My name’s Leora Duncan.” She waited.

“And you dunk people,” he said.

“What?” she said.

“Skip it,” he said.

“That sure is a beautiful picture,” she said. “Looks just like heaven or something.”

“Or something,” said the painter. He took a list of names from his smock pocket. “Duncan, Duncan, Duncan,” he said, scanning the list. “Yes—here you are. You’re entitled to be immortalized. See any faceless body here you’d like me to stick your head on? We’ve got a few choice ones left.”

She studied the mural bleakly. “Gee,” she said, “they’re all the same to me. I don’t know anything about art.”

“A body’s a body, eh?” he said. “All righty. As a master of fine art, I recommend this body here.” He indicated a faceless figure of a woman who was carrying dried stalks to a trash-burner.

“Well,” said Leora Duncan, “that’s more the disposal people, isn’t it? I mean, I’m in service. I don’t do any disposing.”

The painter clapped his hands in mock delight. “You say you don’t know anything about art, and then you prove in the next breath that you know more about it than I do! Of course the sheave-carrier is wrong for a hostess! A snipper, a pruner—that’s more your line.” He pointed to a figure in purple who was sawing a dead branch from an apple tree. “How about her?” he said. “You like her at all?”

“Gosh—” she said, and she blushed and became humble—“that—that puts me right next to Dr. Hitz.”

“That upsets you?” he said.

“Good gravy, no!” she said. “It’s—it’s just such an honor.”

“Ah. You… you admire him, eh?” he said.

“Who doesn’t admire him?” she said, worshiping the portrait of Hitz. It was the portrait of a tanned, white-haired, omnipotent Zeus, two hundred and forty years old. “Who doesn’t admire him?” she said again. “He was responsible for setting up the very first gas chamber in Chicago.”

“Nothing would please me more,” said the painter, “than to put you next to him for all time. Sawing off a limb—that strikes you as appropriate?”

“That is kind of like what I do,” she said. She was demure about what she did. What she did was make people comfortable while she killed them.

◈ ◈ ◈

And, while Leora Duncan was posing for her portrait, into the waiting room bounded Dr. Hitz himself. He was seven feet tall, and he boomed with importance, accomplishments, and the joy of living.

“Well, Miss Duncan! Miss Duncan!” he said, and he made a joke. “What are you doing here?” he said. “This isn’t where the people leave. This is where they come in!”

“We’re going to be in the same picture together,” she said shyly.

“Good!” said Dr. Hitz heartily. “And, say, isn’t that some picture?”

“I sure am honored to be in it with you,” she said.

“Let me tell you,” he said, “I’m honored to be in it with you. Without women like you, this wonderful world we’ve got wouldn’t be possible.”

He saluted her and moved toward the door that led to the delivery rooms. “Guess what was just born,” he said.

“I can’t,” she said.

“Triplets!” he said.

“Triplets!” she said. She was exclaiming over the legal implications of triplets.

The law said that no newborn child could survive unless the parents of the child could find someone who would volunteer to die. Triplets, if they were all to live, called for

three volunteers.

“Do the parents have three volunteers?” said Leora Duncan.

“Last I heard,” said Dr. Hitz, “they had one, and were trying to scrape another two up.”

“I don’t think they made it,” she said. “Nobody made three appointments with us. Nothing but singles going through today, unless somebody called in after I left. What’s the name?”

“Wehling,” said the waiting father, sitting up, red-eyed and frowzy. “Edward K. Wehling, Jr., is the name of the happy father-to-be.”

He raised his right hand, looked at a spot on the wall, gave a hoarsely wretched chuckle. “Present,” he said.

“Oh, Mr. Wehling,” said Dr. Hitz, “I didn’t see you.”

“The invisible man,” said Wehling.

“They just phoned me that your triplets have been born,” said Dr. Hitz. “They’re all fine, and so is the mother. I’m on my way in to see them now.”

“Hooray,” said Wehling emptily.

“You don’t sound very happy,” said Dr. Hitz.

“What man in my shoes wouldn’t be happy?” said Wehling. He gestured with his hands to symbolize care-free simplicity. “All I have to do is pick out which one of the triplets is going to live, then deliver my maternal grandfather to the Happy Hooligan, and come back here with a receipt.”

◈ ◈ ◈

Dr. Hitz became rather severe with Wehling, towered over him. “You don’t believe in population control, Mr. Wehling?” he said.

“I think it’s perfectly keen,” said Wehling tautly.

“Would you like to go back to the good old days, when the population of the Earth was twenty billion—about to become forty billion, then eighty billion, then one hundred and sixty billion? Do you know what a drupelet is, Mr. Wehling?” said Hitz.

“Nope,” said Wehling sulkily.

“A drupelet, Mr. Wehling, is one of the little knobs, one of the little pulpy grains of a blackberry,” said Dr. Hitz. “Without population control, human beings would now be packed on this surface of this old planet like drupelets on a blackberry! Think of it!”

Wehling continued to stare at the same spot on the wall.

“In the year 2000,” said Dr. Hitz, “before scientists stepped in and laid down the law, there wasn’t even enough drinking water to go around, and nothing to eat but sea-weed—and still people insisted on their right to reproduce like jackrabbits. And their right, if possible, to live forever.”

“I want those kids,” said Wehling quietly. “I want all three of them.”

“Of course you do,” said Dr. Hitz. “That’s only human.”

“I don’t want my grandfather to die, either,” said Wehling.

“Nobody’s really happy about taking a close relative to the Catbox,” said Dr. Hitz gently, sympathetically.

“I wish people wouldn’t call it that,” said Leora Duncan.

“What?” said Dr. Hitz.

“I wish people wouldn’t call it ‘the Catbox,’ and things like that,” she said. “It gives people the wrong impression.”

“You’re absolutely right,” said Dr. Hitz. “Forgive me.” He corrected himself, gave the municipal gas chambers their official title, a title no one ever used in conversation. “I should have said, ‘Ethical Suicide Studios,’” he said.

“That sounds so much better,” said Leora Duncan.

“This child of yours—whichever one you decide to keep, Mr. Wehling,” said Dr. Hitz. “He or she is going to live on a happy, roomy, clean, rich planet, thanks to population control. In a garden like that mural there.” He shook his head. “Two centuries ago, when I was a young man, it was a hell that nobody thought could last another twenty years. Now centuries of peace and plenty stretch before us as far as the imagination cares to travel.”

He smiled luminously.

The smile faded as he saw that Wehling had just drawn a revolver.

Wehling shot Dr. Hitz dead. “There’s room for one—a great big one,” he said.

And then he shot Leora Duncan. “It’s only death,” he said to her as she fell. “There! Room for two.”

And then he shot himself, making room for all three of his children.

Nobody came running. Nobody, seemingly, heard the shots.

The painter sat on the top of his stepladder, looking down reflectively on the sorry scene.

◈ ◈ ◈

The painter pondered the mournful puzzle of life demanding to be born and, once born, demanding to be fruitful … to multiply and to live as long as possible—to do all that on a very small planet that would have to last forever.

All the answers that the painter could think of were grim. Even grimmer, surely, than a Catbox, a Happy Hooligan, an Easy Go. He thought of war. He thought of plague. He thought of starvation.

He knew that he would never paint again. He let his paintbrush fall to the drop-cloths below. And then he decided he had had about enough of life in the Happy Garden of Life, too, and he came slowly down from the ladder.

He took Wehling’s pistol, really intending to shoot himself.

But he didn’t have the nerve.

And then he saw the telephone booth in the corner of the room. He went to it, dialed the well-remembered number: “2 B R 0 2 B.”

“Federal Bureau of Termination,” said the very warm voice of a hostess.

“How soon could I get an appointment?” he asked, speaking very carefully.

“We could probably fit you in late this afternoon, sir,” she said. “It might even be earlier, if we get a cancellation.”

“All right,” said the painter, “fit me in, if you please.” And he gave her his name, spelling it out.

“Thank you, sir,” said the hostess. “Your city thanks you; your country thanks you; your planet thanks you. But the deepest thanks of all is from future generations.”

Study Questions

1. The painter is described as a grandpa. How old is he? How old does he look?
2. What is the significance of 2 B R 0 2 B?
3. Why is Wehling unhappy about having triplets?
4. Who did you expect Wehling to shoot third?
5. How did the painter’s feelings change over the story?

Poetry

What is poetry? It may be easier to say what it's not. Poetry is not prose. It's not sentences that are grouped together into paragraphs. Also, it's not something you can summarize. Poetry can be a way of capturing feelings or moments. Poetry can be a way to tell a story. Poetry can be a way to change how people think. As with any communication medium, you get to choose how to use it. Poetry is a vast field with thousands of years of history, and these pages have some general information on its elements and structure.

- Structure
- Terminology
- Rhyme
- Rhythm
- Haiku

Poems

Here are some famous poems that might be of interest. These were selected because they're famous and good examples of techniques mentioned on this site. They're also in the Public Domain.

- E. E. Cummings – It May Not Always Be So; And I Say (1923)
- E. E. Cummings – Since Feeling Is First (1926)
- Clare Harner – Immortality (1934)
- Gerard Manley Hopkins – Spring and Fall (1918)
- Langston Hughes – I, Too (1926)
- Alfred Noyes – The Highwayman (1906)
- Edgar Allan Poe – The Bells (1848)
- Edgar Allan Poe – The Raven (1845)
- William Shakespeare – Sonnet 18 (1609)
- Walt Whitman – O Captain! My Captain! (1865)

More Poems

Here are some other poems that might interest high school students.

- Margaret Atwood – A Visit (1995)
- W.H. Auden – Funeral Blues (1936)
- Carol Ann Duffy – Selling Manhattan (1987)
- Joseph Fasano – For a Student Who Used AI to Write a Paper (2024)
- Guante – How to Explain White Supremacy to a White Supremacist (2016)
- Sharon Olds – I Go Back to May 1937 (2004)
- Mary Oliver – Wild Geese (1986)

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- Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Poetry. (2011). Center for Media & Social Impact.

- Kearney, D. (n.d.) Sharpened Visions: A Poetry Workshop [MOOC]. Coursera. Retrieved 2024.
- Solzman, E. (2012). What is poetry? The Open University. Retrieved 2024.

Structure

In a poem, a horizontal line of text is called a **line**.

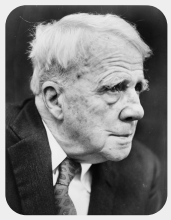
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

When you put several lines together, you get a **stanza**.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

A poem consists of one or more lines, which could be divided into stanzas, but it's not required. Take a look at the following poem, twenty lines in four stanzas.

The Road Not Taken



Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost (1916)

Stanzas

Lines can be organized into stanzas. Stanzas are separated from each other by extra space. Because stanzas are used so frequently, there are terms for describing how many lines they contain.

- **couplet** – a 2-line stanza

- **tercet** – a 3-line stanza
- **quatrain** – a 4-line stanza
- **quintet** – a 5-line stanza
- **sestet** – a 6-line stanza
- **septet** – a 7-line stanza
- **octet** – a 8-line stanza

Many poets use stanzas according to the above definitions, but it's not a strict requirement. You can, for example, put two couplets together and make a 4-line stanza. Because poetry is widespread and has evolved over the centuries, there are few absolute rules about structure.

The following poem, also by Robert Frost, is composed of four quatrains.

Desert Places

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it — it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less —
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars — on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

Robert Frost (1933)

Enjambment

One might remark that lines look like sentences and stanzas look like paragraphs. That's true from a distance, but when we get into details, we often find clear differences. One big difference is that a line doesn't need to form a complete thought. The following poems are examples of **enjambment**, which is when a sentence or idea continues from one line into the next.

We Real Cool

THE POOL PLAYERS.
SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon

© Gwendolyn Brooks (1960)

In the above poem, consider the location of the word "we". Instead of starting lines with it, the author ends them. This creates a distinct rhythm, if you read the poem aloud. Finally, every line ends with "we" except for the last one, which adds weight to it.

The Sky Is Blue

Put things in their place,
My mother shouts. I am standing at
The window, my plastic soldier
at my feet. The sky is blue
and empty. In it floats
the roof of the house across the street.
What place, I ask her.

© David Ignatow (1970)

In the above poem, consider the fourth and fifth lines. "The sky is blue" and "In it floats" both could be pleasant and dreamy, in contrast with the words that follow.

A line can be *end-stopped*, just like this one,
Or it can show *enjambement*, just like this
One, where the sense straddles two lines: you feel
As if from shore you'd stepped into a boat.

© John Hollander (1981)

References

- Brooks, G. (1960). We Real Cool. Poets.org.
- Frost, R. (1933). Desert Places. Poetry.com.
- Frost, R. (1916). The Road Not Taken. Wikisource.
- Hollander, J. (1981). *Rhyme's Reason*. Yale University Press.
- Ignatow, D. (1970). *Poems, 1934-1969*. Wesleyan University Press.
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Terminology

One key element of poetry is describing a situation, person, event, or thing. How you describe a thing tells us how you feel about it. Consider the following sentences.

1. She felt sad.
2. She felt as though she'd just lost her best friend.
3. She turned away and looked out the window. The world outside became blurry.

They could all be used to describe the same woman, but they feel different from each other. The first sentence is simple. The second sentence is figurative, because presumably she didn't actually lose her friend, but it feels heavy. The third sentence doesn't tell us how she feels, and we have to infer it. All three sentences are usable, and your job when writing poetry is to pick and choose the words that capture whatever you're trying to express.

Below are some technical terms of descriptive techniques commonly used in poetry. You've probably seen all of these in action, in books, poems, or music, but perhaps you haven't encountered some the terminology before.

- **Metaphor** – A figure of speech in which one thing (often simple) stands for another thing (often complex).
  - Alfred Noyes: The moon was a ghostly galleon.
  - Emily Dickinson: Fame is a bee. It has a song— It has a sting— Ah, too, it has a wing.
  - William Shakespeare: It is the East, and Juliet, the sun!
- **Simile** – A comparison, similar to a metaphor, that uses like or as.
  - Amy Lowell: You are beautiful and faded, like an old opera tune.
  - Langston Hughes: What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
  - William Wordsworth: I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high…
- **Hyperbole** – Vastly exaggerating.
  - John Keats: A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.
  - Andrew Marvell: A hundred years should go to praise thine eyes.
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson: Here once the embattled farmers stood and fired the shot heard round the world.
- **Personification** – Ascribing the qualities of a human being to an inanimate object or an abstraction. This is similar to anthropomorphism.
  - Lewis Carroll: The sun was shining on the sea, shining with all his might.
  - Carl Sandberg: The fog comes on little cat feet.
  - Emily Dickinson: Because I could not stop for Death, he kindly stopped for me.
- **Symbolism** – Using a verbal object or quality to represent something else.
  - Fire → Destruction. Water → Life.
  - Lion → Leader. Butterfly → Transformation.
  - White hats → Good guys. Black hats → Bad guys.
- **Metonymy** – Substituting the name of an object for something usually found close to it.
  - Joe's new ride was expensive. → Joe's new car was expensive.
  - The Oval Office released a statement. → The President released a statement.

    - Hollywood is using more CG these days. → The movie industry is using more CG these days.
- **Synecdoche** – Using a part of a thing to represent the whole thing, or (the opposite) representing a thing by referring to something it's a part of.
    - Nice wheels. → Nice car.
    - The law is after me. → The police are after me.
    - We have fourteen trunks on our property. → We have fourteen trees on our property.

Read the following poem to see a few of the above terms in use.

Harlem

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes (1951)

The above poem uses simile four times in the second stanza. There is also symbolism in the last few lines. Dreams aren't the kinds of things that could explode, but if you never get your dream, perhaps your feelings could be overwhelming.

For a good example of metaphor, see The Highwayman by Alfred Noyes.

References

- Hughes, L. (1951). Harlem. *Montage of a Dream Deferred*.
- Kearney, D. (n.d.). Sharpened Visions: A Poetry Workshop [MOOC]. Coursera. Retrieved 2024.
- Lindsay, A., Bergstrom, C., & Weal, J. (2019). Introduction to Poetry. Pressbooks. CC BY 4.0. *Some of the above content was copy/pasted from here.*

Rhyme

Rhyme is a tool that many poets use. Some people insist that poems should rhyme, but that's not true. Still, being able to identify and use rhyme—along with other related techniques—is a handy skill. These days, we encounter rhyme, assonance, and consonance in song lyrics.

Why is rhyme interesting? Rhymes are fun to say, they're a challenge to write, and the reader has that exciting moment when they discover the artistic word arrangement.

- **Rhyme** – Words ending with the same stressed vowel and trailing syllables. Also called **perfect rhyme**.
  - Joseph Mohr: Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.
  - Clare Harner: Do not stand by my grave and weep. I am not there. I do not sleep.
  - John Greenleaf Whittier: The sun, that brief December day, rose cheerless over hills of gray.
- **Assonance** – The repetition of vowel sounds anywhere in the words.
  - Traditional: This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.
  - Mother Goose: He's under a haystack, fast asleep.
  - Edgar Allen Poe: Hear the mellow wedding bells, Golden bells!
- **Consonance** – The repetition of consonant sounds anywhere in the words.
  - Robert Frost: The woods are lovely, dark and deep, but I have promises to keep.
  - Walt Whitman: I celebrate myself, and sing myself.
  - William Shakespeare: Increasing store with loss and loss with store.
- **Alliteration** – Words that start with the same letter or sound. See Alliteration for more.
  - Beowulf: He was four times a father, this fighter prince.
  - Traditional: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
  - Emily Dickinson: Were I with thee, wild nights should be our luxury!
- **Slant Rhyme** or **Half Rhyme** – Blanket terms for assonance, consonance, and alliteration.

Take a look at the following poems. Which of the above techniques can you find?

I Am Not Yours

I am not yours, not lost in you,
Not lost, although I long to be
Lost as a candle lit at noon,
Lost as a snowflake in the sea.

You love me, and I find you still
A spirit beautiful and bright,
Yet I am I, who long to be
Lost as a light is lost in light.

Oh plunge me deep in love—put out
My senses, leave me deaf and blind,

Swept by the tempest of your love,
A taper in a rushing wind.

Sara Teasdale (1917)

The above poem contains a nice mix of techniques. Among other things, the second and fourth lines of the first two stanzas rhyme, the first paragraph has six words that start with "L", and the third stanza repeatedly uses the short "E" sound.

The End of Love

The end of love should be a big event.
It should involve the hiring of a hall.
Why the hell not? It happens to us all.
Why should it pass without acknowledgment?

Suits should be dry-cleaned, invitations sent.
Whatever form it takes—a tiff, a brawl—
The end of love should be a big event.
It should involve the hiring of a hall.

Better than the unquestioning descent
Into the trap of silence, than the crawl
From visible to hidden, door to wall.

Get the announcements made, the money spent.
The end of love should be a big event.
It should involve the hiring of a hall.

© Sophie Hannah (1995)

The above poem has both rhyme and repetition. When done well, repetition amplifies the effect. For a longer example of rhyme and consonance, read The Raven, a classic poem written by Edgar Allan Poe.

Internal Rhyme

Many poems have lines that end in rhymes. Another type of rhyming is internal rhyme, which is where two words in a single line rhyme with each other. The following is an excerpt from the song *Rapper's Delight*. The first and fifth lines are good examples of internal rhyme. Assonance shows up in several places, as well.

I'm six-foot-one and I'm tons of fun and I dress to a T
You see, I got more clothes than Muhammad Ali and I dress so viciously
I got bodyguards, I got two big cars, I definitely ain't the whack
I got a Lincoln Continental and a sun-roofed Cadillac
So after school, I take a dip in the pool, which is really on the wall
I got a color TV, so I can see the Knicks play basketball...

© Sugarhill Gang (1979)

Rhyme Dictionaries

If you're writing a poem and can't think of a word to finish your rhyme, use one of the following sites for help.

- The Word Finder
- RhymeZone

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- Hannah, S. (1995). *The Hero and the Girl Next Door*. Carcanet.
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Rhythm

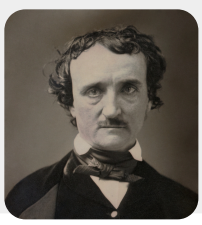
By and large, poetry is and was meant to be spoken aloud. When you pick up a new poem, read out loud at least once, and if possible, several times. In English poetry, word and syllable stress can create a sense of rhythm. Some poets focus on using certain rhythmic patterns, and they might also count the number of syllables per line. This kind of poetry sometimes resembles music. Although contemporary poets tend to be more relaxed about rhythmic requirements, it is still worth spending time looking at some famous historical examples to see what makes them remarkable.

The term **meter** refers to the way stressed and unstressed syllables are used. Below are several different types of meter.

- **Iambic** – A 2-syllable pattern where the second syllable is stressed. Sound: duh-DUH.
  - Common words: Avoid. Deny. Attack. Retreat.
  - Emily Dickinson: We passed the school where children played…
  - William Shakespeare: When I do count the clock that tells the time…
- **Trochaic** – A 2-syllable pattern where the first syllable is stressed. Sound: DUH-duh.
  - Common words: Apples. Cherries. Melons. Grapefruit.
  - W. H. Auden: Earth, receive an honoured guest; William Yeats is laid to rest.
  - William Shakespeare: Double, double toil and trouble.
- **Spondaic** – A 2-syllable pattern where both syllables are stressed. Sound: DUH-DUH. People don't typically write poems using only spondaic meter. You're more likely to find occasional use, such as repetition of a one-syllable word.
  - Common words: Headache. Childhood. Downtown. Handshake.
- **Dactylic** – A 3-syllable pattern where the first syllable is stressed. Sound: DUH-duh-duh.
  - Common words: Poetry. Destiny. Basketball. Elephant.
  - Robert Browning: Just for a handful of silver he left us.
  - William Shakespeare: Out, damned spot. Out, I say.
- **Anapestic** – A 3-syllable pattern where the third syllable is stressed. Sound: duh-duh-DUH.
  - Common words: Understand. Interrupt. Contradict. Underfoot.
  - Edgar Allan Poe: It was many and many a year ago…
  - Clement Clarke Moore: Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house…

Let's take a look at the trochaic pattern in action. The following is the opening of *The Bells* by Edgar Allan Poe (1848).

Hear the sledges with the bells—
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!



In the above fragment, all five lines are written in trochaic. In other words, the pattern is DUH-duh-DUH-duh-DUH-duh… At the same time, the first three lines

have an odd number of syllables, so they end without a final duh. This creates a natural place for the speaker to pause and breathe.

The poem continues as follows.

> While the stars that oversprinkle
> All the heavens, seem to twinkle
> With a crystalline delight;
> Keeping time, time, time,
> In a sort of Runic rhyme,
> To the tintinabulation that so musically wells
> From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
> Bells, bells, bells—
> From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

In this second snippet, the rhythm eventually changes. Lines four ("time time time"), seven ("bells, bells, bells, bells") and eight ("bells, bells, bells") break the trochaic rhythm. Each of those words needs to be stressed, and none of them are followed by an unstressed sound. As a result, the speaker doesn't have time to relax and breathe, and the sections feel heavy. Poe's intent was that you would imagine real church bells really ringing. Did he succeed?

If you are interested, take a few minutes and read the entirety of The Bells.

Scansion

The process of identifying a poem's rhythm is called **scansion**. Sometimes you can easily find the rhythm, but other times it can be unclear, because poets often change rhythm in the middle of their poems. In many situations, opinions may vary and there could be several reasonable descriptions.

Above, we saw several types of rhythm. There are a multitude of other types that you might use or encounter. Don't rush out and try to memorize them all in a short time. Learn whatever your instructor is emphasizing, and leave the others for the future. To write interesting poetry one must write a lot of poetry, so prioritize that.

References

- Glossary of Poetic Terms. (n.d.). The Poetry Foundation. Retrieved 2024.
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Haiku

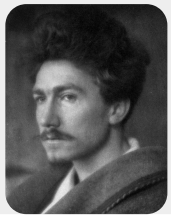
Haiku originated from Japan over three hundred years ago. The four great masters of haiku are said to be Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), Buson (1716-1784), Kobayashi Issa (1763-1828), and Shiki (1867-1902). Whereas Japanese haiku history is quite old, English haiku found its beginnings in the 20th century.

The following poem is considered by some to be the first famous English haiku, although others claim it doesn't qualify because of its structure.

In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound (1913)



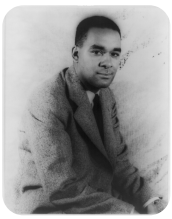
English haiku was largely considered a novelty until the 1950s, when it regained slight popularity in the United States through the work of Richard Wright and Jack Kerouac, who were both famous fiction writers of the time.

Structure

Traditional Japanese haiku has a 5-7-5 pattern, a seasonal word, and a cut word. English haiku is different, though, and what is required depends on who you ask. Some people insist that the haiku must fit the syllable pattern: 5 syllables on the first line, 7 syllables on the second line, and 5 syllables on the third line. Others are more flexible with the syllable count, and they suggest that 12-17 syllables is a reasonable overall length.

Other common characteristics that may be encountered in English haiku include: a seasonal reference, a wistful tone, a lack of superfluous words, a focus on imagery, and non-rhyming lines. See the below examples for various writing styles. If you are writing haiku for an assignment, check with your instructor for the specific requirements.

Poet: Richard Wright



Richard N. Wright (September 4, 1908-November 28, 1960) was a famous African American author. He wrote *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), two seminal books on race and discrimination in the United States, along with a variety of fiction and non-fiction novels and stories. Later in life, he became a prolific haiku author, completing over 4,000 poems. Many of his poems were written when he was in bad health, too tired to sit for hours at the typewriter working on his longer books. Here are some haiku written by © Richard Wright.

Just enough of snow
For a boy's finger to write
His name on the porch.

A huge drift of snow
Blocks the narrow pathway to
The little toy shop.

Shaking the water
Off his dripping body,
The dog swims again.

Keep straight down this block,
Then turn right where you will find
A peach tree blooming.

A butterfly makes
The sunshine even brighter
With fluttering wings.

The sound of the rain,
Blotted out now and then
By a sticky cough.

Poet: James William Hackett

James William Hackett (1929-2015) was an American poet who, unlike the other authors on this page, is mainly known for his haiku poetry. The *James W. Hackett Annual International Award for Haiku* was named after Hackett, and he published several books of poetry during his life. Here are some haiku written by © James Hackett.

Beyond this mountain,
so vast as to strain the eye:
a world of autumn.

Deep within the stream
the huge fish lie motionless,
facing the current.

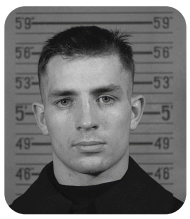
Rubble everywhere...
except for a flight of stairs
ending in the air

When finally caught
The kitten's tail is given
A good licking

Kitten crouches,
Then leaps at the genie
rising from the tea

For a real measure
of the day's heat, see the length
of the sleeping cat

Poet: Jack Kerouac



Jean-Louis Lebris de Kérouac (March 12, 1922-October 21, 1969), also known as *Jack Kerouac*, was an American author and poet. Kerouac's famous books include *The Dharma Bums* and *On the Road*. Kerouac was a Beat Generation writer, and consistent with that subculture's values, he lived a non-standard and unregulated life. Unsurprisingly, this is reflected in his haiku, where he considered rules about syllables and seasons to be mere recommendations. Here are some haiku written by © Jack Kerouac.

You'd be surprised
how little I knew
Even up to yesterday

Nightfall,
too dark to read the page
too cold.

The bottom of my shoes
are clean
from walking in the rain

After the earthquake,
A child crying
In the silence

A raindrop from
the roof
fell in my beer

A bird hanging
on the wire
At dawn

Poet: Therese Sellers

Therese Sellers (1960-) is a Greek-American poet and writer. She started writing poetry at the age of six and published haiku on Twitter every day for years. Here are some haiku written by © Therese Sellers.

I was of his life
The sunshine, he said, and left
Through an airport gate.

Her best poems sprang
Like the winged, immortal horse
Out of blood and loss.

Silent for decades
She found her voice on Twitter
And the dam burst.

What are you doing
Staying in your house all day?
Waiting for the tide.

Stay inside the house.
This is your strength and safety,
You are a turtle.

Whispers in autumn
Become shouts in the winter
You must leave this place.

Online Publication

There are many websites where students can submit their own haiku for possible publication. Two notable options are The Mainichi, a Japanese newspaper that publishes one reader-submitted haiku each day, and the Itoen Shinhaiku Contest, which takes place annually.

For contemporary poets, social media is an easy way to find an audience. For example, you can post a poem on Threads, or you can write a poem about a picture and post both of them on Instagram.

Translations

Translating haiku from Japanese to English is an interesting exercise. If you try to match the 5-7-5 structure, the overall feeling could easily get lost. Here are some translations of haiku originally written by Matsuo Basho. The first three are translations of the same poem. Which one do you think sounds best?

old pond—
a frog jumps in,
water's sound

the old pond—
a frog jumps in,
sound of water.

an old silent pond
a frog jumps into the pond,
splash! silence again

in the capital:
ninety-nine thousand people
blossom viewing

not dead yet
at journey's end—
autumn evening

a snowy morning—
by myself,
chewing on dried salmon.

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It May Not Always Be So

Edward Estlin Cummings (October 14, 1894–September 3, 1962), also known as *E. E. Cummings* or *e e cummings*, was an American poet and author. He wrote many books, plays, and nearly 3,000 poems over the course of his life. Cummings is particularly well-known for his poetry, in which he liked to experiment. He often wrote without punctuation and capitalization, and he was known to adjust line spacing and indentation, all of which were tools to capture the mood of each poem.

It May Not Always Be So; And I Say
E. E. Cummings
Tulips and Chimneys
1923

it may not always be so;and i say
that if your lips,which i have loved,should touch
another's,and your dear strong fingers clutch
his heart,as mine in time not far away;
if on another's face your sweet hair lay
in such silence as i know,or such
great writhing words as,uttering overmuch,
stand helplessly before the spirit at bay;

if this should be,i say if this should be—
you of my heart,send me a little word;
that i may go unto him,and take his hands,
saying, Accept all happiness from me.
Then shall i turn my face,and hear one bird
sing terribly afar in the lost lands.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Study Questions

1. Is this poem happy or sad?
2. What is the effect of the bizarre capitalization and punctuation?
3. What is the rhyme pattern?
4. Compare this with Since Feeling Is First. Which do you think is more interesting? Why?

Since Feeling Is First

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[since feeling is first]
E. E. Cummings
is 5
1926

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;

wholly to be a fool
while Spring is in the world

my blood approves,
and kisses are a better fate
than wisdom
lady i swear by all flowers. Don’t cry
— the best gesture of my brain is less than
your eyelids’ flutter which says

we are for each other; then
laugh, leaning back in my arms
for life’s not a paragraph

And death i think is no parenthesis

Study Questions

1. Is this poem happy or sad?
2. Does the author think being a fool is a good idea?
3. What is the effect of the last line?
4. Compare this with It May Not Always Be So. Which do you think is more interesting? Why?

Immortality

Clare Harner (1909–1977), was an American journalist who is best known for this poem. She was born in Kansas and later moved to California. Although several of Harner's other poems were published, none are well-known. The below poem was largely forgotten until 1977, when John Wayne read it at a memorial service. In recent decades, it has been used following tragic events in many countries around the world, and the lyrics have been used in several songs.

Immortality
Clare Harner
The Gypsy
December 1934

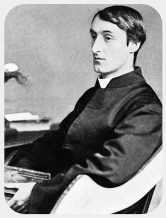
Do not stand
By my grave, and weep.
I am not there,
I do not sleep—
I am the thousand winds that blow
I am the diamond glints in snow
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle, autumn rain.
As you awake with morning's hush,
I am the swift, up-flinging rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight,
I am the day transcending night.
Do not stand
By my grave, and cry—
I am not there,
I did not die.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Study Questions

1. What is the tone? Is it happy? Sad? Flippant?
2. How does the fourth line compare to the final line?
3. Where does the speed change?
4. Compare this with O Captain! My Captain!, another poem about death.

Spring and Fall



Gerard Manley Hopkins (July 28, 1844–June 8, 1889), was a famous English poet. Hopkins was a prolific writer in university, but later he converted religions, decided to become a priest, and burned all of his papers. Some years after that, he resumed writing poetry in private. Nothing was published until 1918, some thirty years after his death. Hopkins is famous for using **sprung verse**, a kind of meter where each line has a certain number of stressed syllables, and there may be any number of unstressed syllables. This is in contrast to traditional types of meter, where all syllables are counted.

Spring and Fall
Gerard Manley Hopkins
Poems
1918

to a young child

Márgarét, áre you gríeving
Over Goldengrove unleaving?
Leáves like the things of man, you
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you?
Ah! ás the heart grows older
It will come to such sights colder
By and by, nor spare a sigh
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie;
And yet you wíll weep and know why.
Now no matter, child, the name:
Sórrow's spríngs áre the same.
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed
What heart heard of, ghost guessed:
It ís the blight man was born for,
It is Margaret you mourn for.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Study Questions

1. What is the meaning of the word "unleaving" in the second line?
2. Why is Margaret crying?
3. What does the last line mean?
4. Can you find the rhyme pattern?

I, Too

Langston Hughes (February 1, 1901–May 22, 1967), was a famous American writer and activist. Born in Missouri, Hughes grew up in the Midwest and later settled in New York City.

The below poem is from his first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*. The opening of the poem is a reference to I Hear America Singing, an 1860 poem by Walt Whitman that painted the country in a generally positive light. Hughes brings an entirely different background and perspective.

I, Too
Langston Hughes
The Weary Blues
1926

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed,—

I, too, am America.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Study Questions

1. Is there any rhyme or rhythm?
2. What is the meaning of "I'll be at the table" in the third stanza?
3. How does the speaker feel about America? Are they hopeful?

The Highwayman

Alfred Noyes (September 16, 1880–June 25, 1958), was an English writer and poet. He wrote *The Highwayman* early in his career, and the poem brought his name to mainstream attention. Almost a century later, in a 1995 BBC poll to find Britain's favorite poem, *The Highwayman* came in at 15th place. This ballad tells the romantic story about a highwayman (a thief who stole from travelers along the highway) who falls in love with a young woman at a nearby inn. The poet makes heavy use of imagery and metaphor.

The Highwayman
Alfred Noyes
Blackwood's Magazine
1906

PART ONE

I

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
And the highwayman came riding—
Riding—riding—
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

II

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin;
They fitted with never a wrinkle: his boots were up to the thigh!
And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
His pistol butts a-twinkle,
His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

III

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard,
And he tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred;
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Bess, the landlord's daughter,
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

IV

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked
Where Tim the ostler listened; his face was white and peaked;
His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,
But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's red-lipped daughter,
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

V

"One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,
Then look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though Hell should bar the way."

VI

He rose upright in the stirrups; he scarce could reach her hand,
But she loosened her hair i' the casement! His face burnt like a brand
As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over his breast;
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,
(Oh, sweet, black waves in the moonlight!)
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the West.

PART TWO

I

He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon;
And out o' the tawny sunset, before the rise o' the moon,
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,
A red-coat troop came marching—
Marching—marching—
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-door.

II

They said no word to the landlord, they drank his ale instead,
But they gagged his daughter and bound her to the foot of her narrow bed;
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!
There was death at every window;
And hell at one dark window;
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that he would ride.

III

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest;
They had bound a musket beside her, with the barrel beneath her breast!
"Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her.
She heard the dead man say—
"Look for me by moonlight;
Watch for me by moonlight;
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though Hell should bar the way!"

IV

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood!

They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years,
Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,
Cold, on the stroke of midnight,
The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

V

The tip of one finger touched it; she strove no more for the rest!
Up, she stood up to attention, with the barrel beneath her breast,
She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;
For the road lay bare in the moonlight;
Blank and bare in the moonlight;
And the blood of her veins in the moonlight throbbed to her love's refrain.

VI

Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs ringing clear;
Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf that they did not hear?
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,
The highwayman came riding,
Riding, riding!
The red-coats looked to their priming! She stood up, straight and still!

VII

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! Tlot-tlot, in the echoing night!
Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like a light!
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,
Then her finger moved in the moonlight,
Her musket shattered the moonlight,
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him— with her death.

VIII

He turned; he spurred to the West; he did not know who stood
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own red blood!
Not till the dawn he heard it, his face grew grey to hear
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
The landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the darkness there.

IX

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier brandished high!
Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden noon; wine-red was his velvet coat,
When they shot him down on the highway,
Down like a dog on the highway,
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of lace at his throat.

X

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,

A highwayman comes riding—
Riding—riding—
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

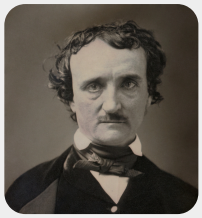
XI

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard;
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred;
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Bess, the landlord's daughter,
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

Study Questions

1. What did Tim do after he heard the conversation?
2. Near the end, why does the highwayman return to the inn?
3. What is the rhyme pattern in the poem?
4. The author uses a lot of metaphor, imagery, and repetition. What caught your eye?

The Bells



Edgar Allan Poe (January 19, 1809–October 7, 1849), was a famous American poet and author. He is particularly known for his dark and mysterious tales and is said to be the creator of the detective fiction genre. Some of his most famous short stories are *The Cask of Amontillado*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Poe completed hundreds of works, ranging from essays to short stories, to poems, before dying at the young age of forty. His most well-known poem is *The Raven*, a scary tale that is often read around Halloween.

The Bells
Edgar Allan Poe
1848

I.

Hear the sledges with the bells—
Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

II.

Hear the mellow wedding bells,
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!
From the molten-golden notes,
And all in tune,
What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens, while she gloats
On the moon!
Oh, from out the sounding cells,
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
How it swells!
How it dwells
On the Future! how it tells
Of the rapture that impels
To the swinging and the ringing
Of the bells, bells, bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells—
To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

III.

Hear the loud alarum bells—
Brazen bells!
What tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of night
How they scream out their affright!
Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek,
Out of tune,
In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic fire,
Leaping higher, higher, higher,
With a desperate desire,
And a resolute endeavor
Now—now to sit or never,
By the side of the pale-faced moon.
Oh, the bells, bells, bells!
What a tale their terror tells
Of Despair!
How they clang, and clash, and roar!
What a horror they outpour
On the bosom of the palpitating air!
Yet the ear it fully knows,
By the twanging,
And the clanging,
How the danger ebbs and flows;
Yet the ear distinctly tells,
In the jangling,
And the wrangling.
How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or the swelling in the anger of the bells—
Of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells—
In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

IV.

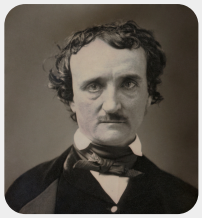
Hear the tolling of the bells—
Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright
At the melancholy menace of their tone!
For every sound that floats
From the rust within their throats
Is a groan.
And the people—ah, the people—
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who tolling, tolling, tolling,

In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone—
They are neither man nor woman—
They are neither brute nor human—
They are Ghouls:
And their king it is who tolls;
And he rolls, rolls, rolls,
Rolls
A pæan from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
With the pæan of the bells!
And he dances, and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the pæan of the bells—
Of the bells:
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells—
To the sobbing of the bells;
Keeping time, time, time,
As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
To the rolling of the bells—
Of the bells, bells, bells—
To the tolling of the bells,
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells—
Bells, bells, bells—
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

Study Questions

1. The poem starts out with a happy tone. Where does the tone shift?
2. There are four stanzas. Which stanzas are shorter? Which are longer?
3. This poem contains a great deal of rhyme, internal rhyme, and alliteration. Find some examples that caught your attention.
4. There is a lot of repetition in the poem. What would change if it were erased?

The Raven



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The Raven
Edgar Allan Poe
1845

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
Only this and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
"'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;—
This it is and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened wide the door;—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"—
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.

“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;—
        ’Tis the wind and nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—
        Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!”
        Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
        With such name as “Nevermore.”

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—
Till I scarcely more than muttered “Other friends have flown before—
On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my Hopes have flown before.”
        Then the bird said “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
        Of ‘Never—nevermore’.”

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore—
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
        Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o’er,
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,
        She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.

"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me—tell me, I implore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Study Questions

1. What rhyme patterns can you find in each line? In each stanza?
2. Is the author making use of assonance or consonance?
3. Is the narrator imagining the raven? Is the raven real?

Sonnet 18

William Shakespeare (April 23, 1564–April 23, 1616), sometimes called *The Bard of Avon* or even *The Bard*, was an English playwright and poet. He is widely regarded as the greatest English writer in history. Some of his most famous plays include *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo & Juliet*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Each of these plays has been performed widely over the centuries, and the basic plot of each of them has been adapted to dozens of books and movies. It is hard to overstate the degree of Shakespeare's influence on English literature. Along with his plays, Shakespeare also wrote 154 sonnets, including the poem shown below.

Sonnet 18
William Shakespeare
1609

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed:

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Study Questions

1. What is the theme of this poem?
2. What makes this a love poem?
3. What rhyme scheme does the poem use?
4. What is the meaning of each line? Can you re-word the poem in a simpler fashion?

References

- Mabillard, A. (1999). Sonnet 18. Shakespeare Online.

O Captain! My Captain!

Walter Whitman Jr. (May 31, 1819–March 26, 1892), commonly known as *Walt Whitman*, was a famous American poet. His most famous poetry collection is *Leaves of Grass* (1865). During the American Civil War, Whitman worked in hospitals in Washington, D.C., which greatly influenced the topic of his work. The below poem is an extended metaphor about the death of Abraham Lincoln.

O Captain! My Captain!
Walt Whitman
1865

O Captain! My Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
    But O heart! heart! heart!
        O the bleeding drops of red,
            Where on the deck my Captain lies,
                Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! My Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
    Here captain! dear father!
        This arm beneath your head;
            It is some dream that on the deck,
                You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
    Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
        But I, with mournful tread,
            Walk the deck my captain lies,
                Fallen cold and dead.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Study Questions

1. In the first two lines, what is "done" and what is "won"?
2. If Abraham Lincoln is the captain, what is the ship?
3. What is the structure of each stanza? Which lines are positive? Which are negative?

4. What is the rhyme pattern of each stanza? Does the author follow it perfectly?
5. Compare this with Immortality, another poem about death.

Tools

See individual pages for specific topics.

- APA – a style guide for the academic writing standard
- Changes – here are a few ways to see exactly how a document has changed over time
- Dictionaries – choosing a good dictionary improves quality and saves time
- Grammar – a few reference sites and grammar checkers
- Online Sources – websites for finding academic articles in professional journals

APA

There are several common styles for page formatting, citations and references. This page provides information about the 7th Edition of **APA** (American Psychological Association) style. Another popular style you might encounter is **MLA** (Modern Language Association). High schools, universities, and academic journals typically require one one of these styles, and after you're comfortable using one style, it's easy to switch to another when needed.

Templates

Many instructors provide an APA template for writing assignments. Google Docs and Microsoft Word also have APA templates, which you may want to use in the future. Templates are great because then you don't have to remember conventions for line spacing, page numbering, margins, and other such tedious things.

Date

1. Write the month using letters and the year in four digits. For example, May 20, 2024 or 20 May 2024. This avoids ambiguity.
2. The date should be either either when you submitted the assignment or the submission deadline for the assignment.
3. Don't write the weekday.

Paragraphs

1. Start each new paragraph with a **TAB**. If the document is set to English, the default tab size should already be correct (1.27 cm, 0.5 inches).
2. Don't put a blank line between paragraphs.

Pages

1. Put the page number in the top right corner.
2. Start the references section on a new page. In most word processors, **CTRL + ENTER** creates a page break.

Word Count

Official APA guidelines state that the word count includes everything in the document, but many instructors do not follow this. One common alternative is to only count the words from the title to the end of the conclusion (and not the reference section). Check your course documentation to be sure.

Referencing

When you're writing a paper that references other journals, websites, books, or other materials, it is important to provide clear information about where your data comes from, for several reasons. First, people deserve credit for their work. Second, the reader might want to do further research. Third, schools have rules about plagiarism.

Paraphrasing Examples

- Julius Irving was also known by the nickname Doctor J (Golliver, 2013).

- Mental complexity increases well into adulthood (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).
- The teacher is more important than the principal (Leithwood et al., 2019).
- Hiatt (2019) explains how the singer experienced backlash following initial success.
- Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize the value of sustainable education.
- Kumar et al. (2016) outlines the history of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Quoting Examples

Printed work typically has page numbers. If there is a page number, include it.

- "Pine River has been home to a company specializing in the production of ballistic glass since 2021" (Grimler, 2024).
- Grimler (2024) states, "Pine River has been home to a company specializing in the production of ballistic glass since 2021."
- "Despite the existence of these laws, lack of knowledge of them causes many problems to arise" (Tokyo Labor Consultation Center, 2023, pg. 2).
- Although laws are on the books, "lack of knowledge of them causes many problems to arise" (Tokyo Labor Consultation Center, 2023, pg. 2)."

Block Quote Examples

If a quote is 40+ words (typically more than 2 lines), it should be a block quote.

According to Reynolds (2011),

> Presentation technology has evolved over the years, but this does not mean presentations have necessarily evolved much. *Death by PowerPoint* is still too common. Thanks to the work of communication experts such as Bert Decker, Jerry Weissman, and Carmine Gallo, and presentation design gurus such as Nancy Duarte and Cliff Atkinson—plus many more around the world—things have improved.

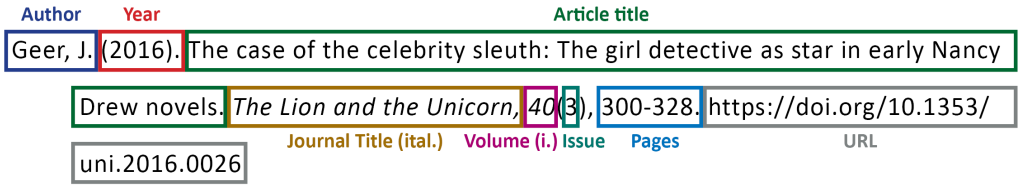
The entire quote is indented, and no quotation marks are needed. Either cite the source before the block quote (shown above) or at the end of the block quote (shown below).

> Presentation technology has evolved over the years, but this does not mean presentations have necessarily evolved much. *Death by PowerPoint* is still too common. Thanks to the work of communication experts such as Bert Decker, Jerry Weissman, and Carmine Gallo, and presentation design gurus such as Nancy Duarte and Cliff Atkinson—plus many more around the world—things have improved. (Reynolds, 2011)

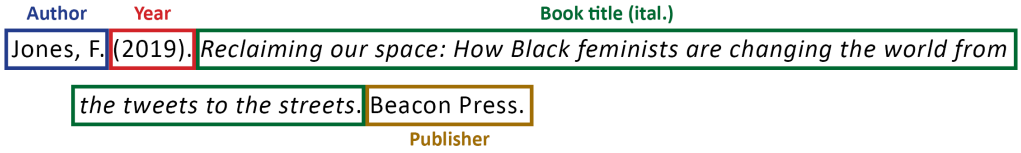
Reference List Examples

This goes at the end of your paper. APA guidelines state that the references section should begin on a new page.

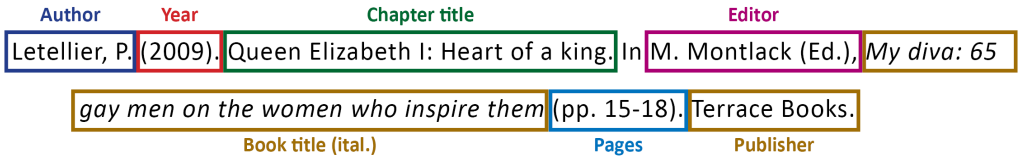
Journal or magazine article


Author
Year
Article title
Geer, J. (2016). The case of the celebrity sleuth: The girl detective as star in early Nancy Drew novels. The Lion and the Unicorn, 40(3), 300-328. https://doi.org/10.1353/uni.2016.0026
Journal Title (ital.)
Volume (i.)
Issue
Pages
URL

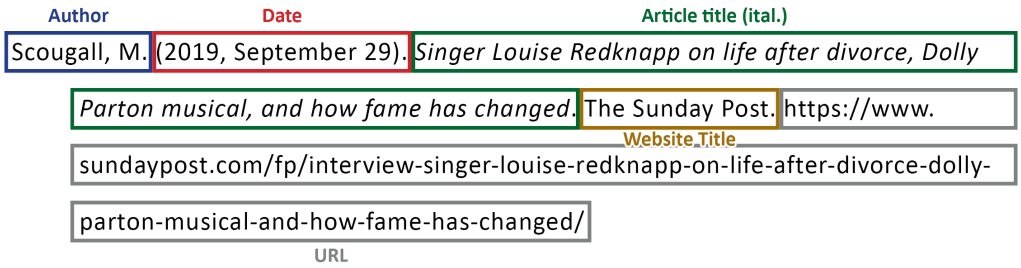
Book


Author
Year
Book title (ital.)
Jones, F. (2019). Reclaiming our space: How Black feminists are changing the world from the tweets to the streets. Beacon Press.
Publisher

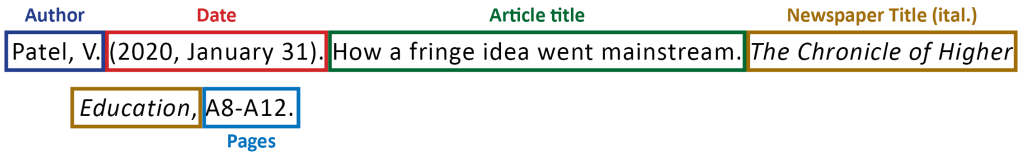
Book chapter


Author
Year
Chapter title
Editor
Letellier, P. (2009). Queen Elizabeth I: Heart of a king. In M. Montlack (Ed.), My diva: 65 gay men on the women who inspire them (pp. 15-18). Terrace Books.
Book title (ital.)
Pages
Publisher

Webpage


Author
Date
Article title (ital.)
Scougall, M. (2019, September 29). Singer Louise Redknapp on life after divorce, Dolly Parton musical, and how fame has changed. The Sunday Post. https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/interview-singer-louise-redknapp-on-life-after-divorce-dolly-parton-musical-and-how-fame-has-changed/
Website Title
URL

Newspaper article


Author
Date
Article title
Newspaper Title (ital.)
Patel, V. (2020, January 31). How a fringe idea went mainstream. The Chronicle of Higher Education, A8-A12.
Pages

Google Docs

If you write your paper in Google Docs and use the built-in features, it's easy to create a proper reference list. Microsoft Word has similar capabilities. You could do all of the reference formatting manually, but that takes a long time and mistakes are likely, so the following method is recommended.

1. **Create the document**
    - If the teacher gives you a template, use the template. Or do the following...
    - Open Google Docs. Click **File → New → Template gallery → Report APA 7th Ed.**
    - Write.
2. **Add sources**
    - Click **Tools → Citations**. Select **APA (7th ed.)**. Click **+ Add citation source**. Fill in the details. This is quick if you have a URL (for a website) or ISBN (for a book).
    - Do this for each source.
3. **Citations and quotations**
    - In the text, place your cursor where the citation should appear.
    - In the Citations sidebar, hover over the source.
    - Click **Cite**. The source will appear in the text.
    - If necessary, write in the page number or numbers.
4. **Insert a bibliography**

- Go to the end of the text. Press **CTRL + ENTER** to start a new page.
- Click **Tools → Citations**.
- In the sidebar, click **Insert bibliography**.
- If necessary, make small changes.

References

- APA Citation Generator. (n.d.) Scribblr. Retrieved 2024.
- Forrester, S. APA Style. (2024) Lasell University. CC BY-SA 4.0. *Some of the above content was copy/pasted from here.*
- Reference Examples. (2020). APA Style.
- Sexton J. & Soles D. (2019). Composition and Literature. B.C. Open Textbook Collection.
- ▶️ Google Docs: How to Create Citations & a Bibliography. (2021). Howtech, YouTube.

Changes

When you've made significant revisions to a piece of writing, sometimes it's useful to take a look and see exactly what you've added or removed. There are several useful tools for this.

Method 1: Diffcheck

1. Open https://diffcheck.net/comparetext
2. Copy/paste the old version in the left box.
3. Copy/paste the new version in the right box.
4. Click **Compare**.
5. Look below to see the changes. Added text should be in green. Removed text should be in red.
6. Save the webpage as a PDF.
    - In Chrome, **File → Print → Save as PDF**.
    - In Firefox, **File → Print → Save as PDF**.
    - In Safari, **File → Export to PDF → Save**.

Method 2: Google Docs

1. You should have the *Old Version* as a Google Doc and the *New Version* as a different Google Doc.
2. Open the *Old Version*.
3. Click **Tools → Compare documents**.
4. Select the *New Version* as the comparison document.
5. Write your name in the **Attribute differences to** box.
6. Click **Compare**.
7. Look at the resulting file to see the changes. Old text should be ~~crossed out~~, and new text should be in color.
8. To print, you might need to download the file first. Click **File → Download → Microsoft Word (.docx)**. Open the document in Microsoft Word, and print from there.

References

- Gavin, B. (2020). How to compare documents in Google Docs. How-To Geek.

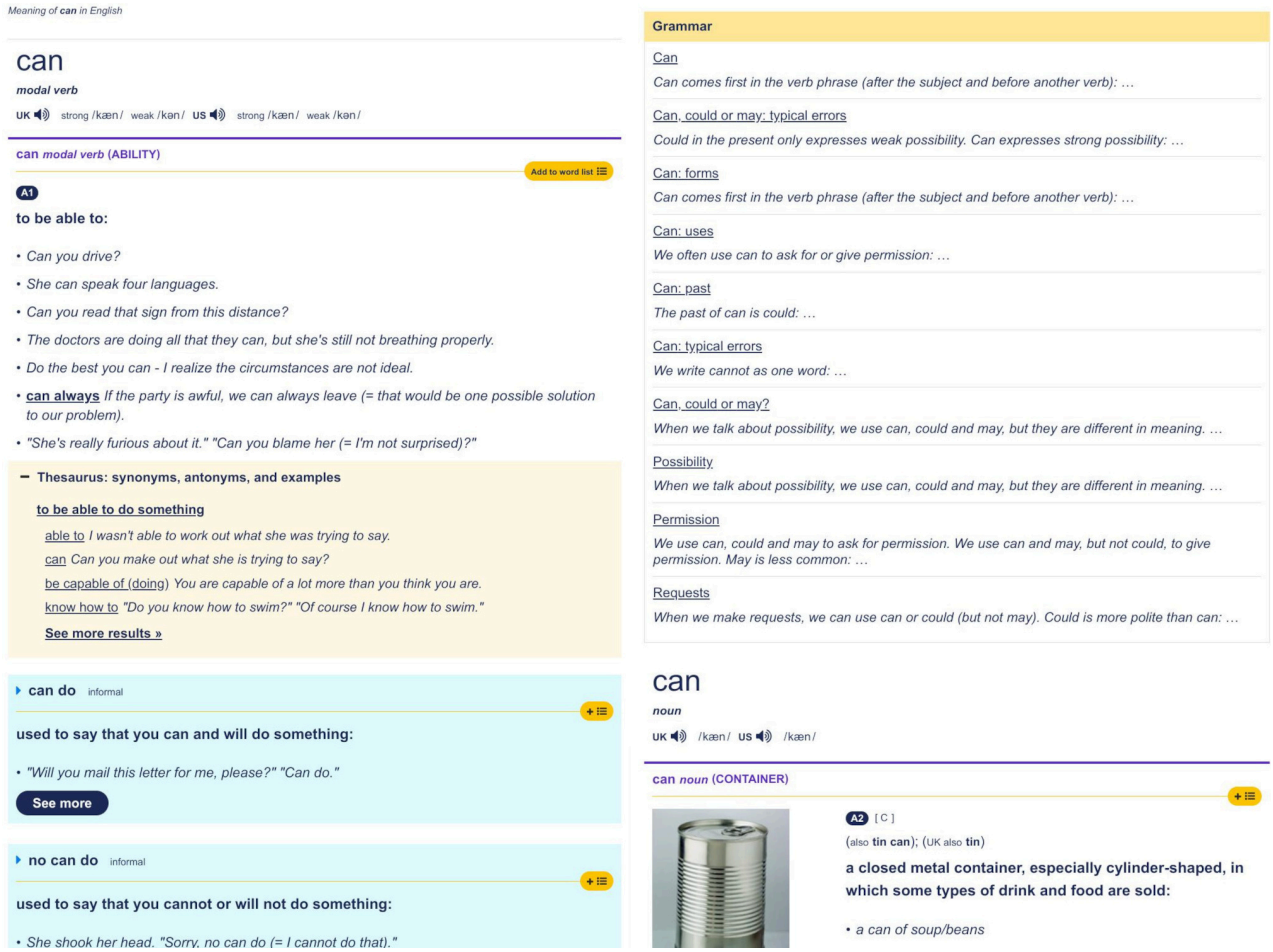
Dictionaries

When writing with unfamiliar vocabulary, use a dictionary to find the right word. Here are two excellent dictionary websites.

- Cambridge Dictionary
- Dictionary.com
- Jisho (English-Japanese)

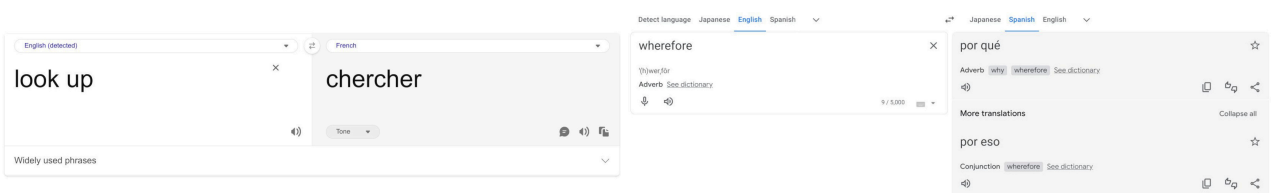
For writing, a good dictionary shows multiple meanings and example sentences. In contrast, when you're reading, you already have an example sentence in front of you—that's why you opened the dictionary—so other examples are less essential.

A Good Example


Meaning of can in English
can
modal verb
UK strong /kæn/ weak /kən/ US strong /kæn/ weak /kən/
can modal verb (ABILITY)
Add to word list
A1
to be able to:
• Can you drive?
• She can speak four languages.
• Can you read that sign from this distance?
• The doctors are doing all that they can, but she's still not breathing properly.
• Do the best you can - I realize the circumstances are not ideal.
• can always If the party is awful, we can always leave (= that would be one possible solution to our problem).
• "She's really furious about it." "Can you blame her (= I'm not surprised)?"
Thesaurus: synonyms, antonyms, and examples
to be able to do something
able to I wasn't able to work out what she was trying to say.
can Can you make out what she is trying to say?
be capable of (doing) You are capable of a lot more than you think you are.
know how to "Do you know how to swim?" "Of course I know how to swim."
See more results »
can do informal
used to say that you can and will do something:
• "Will you mail this letter for me, please?" "Can do."
See more
no can do informal
used to say that you cannot or will not do something:
• She shook her head. "Sorry, no can do (= I cannot do that)."
Grammar
Can
Can comes first in the verb phrase (after the subject and before another verb): …
Can, could or may: typical errors
Could in the present only expresses weak possibility. Can expresses strong possibility: …
Can: forms
Can comes first in the verb phrase (after the subject and before another verb): …
Can: uses
We often use can to ask for or give permission: …
Can: past
The past of can is could: …
Can: typical errors
We write cannot as one word: …
Can, could or may?
When we talk about possibility, we use can, could and may, but they are different in meaning. …
Possibility
When we talk about possibility, we use can, could and may, but they are different in meaning. …
Permission
We use can, could and may to ask for permission. We use can and may, but not could, to give permission. May is less common: …
Requests
When we make requests, we can use can or could (but not may). Could is more polite than can: …
can
noun
UK /kæn/ US /kæn/
can noun (CONTAINER)
A2 [C]
(also tin can); (UK also tin)
a closed metal container, especially cylinder-shaped, in which some types of drink and food are sold:
• a can of soup/beans

This site has a lengthy definition that spans multiple pages.

Two Bad Examples



The second meaning is not shown. There are no example sentences.

References

- Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Cambridge University Press & Assessment. Retrieved 2024.
- Google Translate. (n.d.). Google. Retrieved 2024.
- Search Microsoft Translate. (n.d.). Microsoft Bing. Retrieved 2024.

Grammar

Students all have their own experiences with reading and writing, which means information useful to one learner may not be relevant to another. So, when you're looking for information about grammar online, expect to spend several minutes looking for the answers. Here are some informative websites.

1. Grammar Essentials – many clear explanations and examples
2. The Oregon State Guide to Grammar – videos and text on various topics
3. Khan Academy: Grammar – a study site with short explanation videos and quizzes

Grammar Checkers

The below websites have free grammar checkers that, as of 2025, work better than many others tested by the author.

1. Scribens. Recommended by the author.
2. QuillBot Grammar Checker. OK if you ignore the extra features.
3. Grammarly Grammar Check. OK if you ignore the extra features.

When using a grammar checker, there are several points to consider.

- All of the useful stuff is already free. Don't pay for anything.
- Use the grammar checker to fix bad spelling and grammar.
- Don't click **Accept All**. Look at each suggestion one at a time, see if you understand and agree with it. The main goal is understanding.
- Check one paragraph at a time. Copying pages of text can remove formatting and you might not notice.
- The only useful feature is the grammar checker. Many websites want to sell "premium" features, but these are not useful and many of them violate course policies on generative AI.
- Google Docs and some versions of Microsoft Word have built-in grammar checkers. If you aren't using anything else, at least use one of these.

Sometimes students ask why instructors suggest the use of grammar checkers but outlaw generative AI like ChatGPT. There are several reasons. First, grammar checkers are an old creation — they were invented in the 1980s. Second, the primary goal is to help you understand your own mistakes, which will improve your future writing. Third, grammar checking is about identifying errors. It's not generative AI because it doesn't *generate* things. So, although students can easily misuse grammar checkers — by pressing **Accept All** — they can also be a great source of targeted grammar feedback.

Online Sources

A reasonable starting point for many research papers is a basic web search. If your topic is elephant poaching, for example, you could do a search for **elephant poaching** or perhaps **elephant poaching blog** or **elephant poaching news**.

- **Newspaper articles** tend to be fairly short, but they also often provide real-world examples and quotes.
- **Blogs** can be written by either individuals or organizations, and some blogs are informative and reliable. They tend to be relatively detailed. If you are concerned about reliability, take a look at Evaluating Sources.

Journals

Here are some websites for finding academic papers in professional journals. As a high school student, keep an eye on the difficulty of these sources. Professional research papers are written for professional audiences — not high school students — so sometimes they are difficult or impossible to understand. When you're trying to decipher something challenging, spend a few minutes on it, and if you don't make any progress, either ask for help or find another source.

1. JStor
2. Sage Journals
3. Google Scholar
4. JURN

The above sites work much better with a subscription. Your campus probably has a subscription, so try to do research on campus. Or, try a public library; many public libraries have journal subscriptions.

Advice

See individual pages for specific topics.

- Process Writing – organizing how we use our time can help make the process smooth
- Academic Voice – academic writing generally avoids words like I or you
- Exciting Titles – catch the reader's eye before they start reading
- Key Sentences – thesis statements and topic sentences
- Evaluating Sources – don't believe everything that you read
- Academic Integrity – when in doubt, review the rules

Websites

The following sites might useful for students looking for detailed information that they haven't found here.

1. The Elements of Style by William Strunk, 1918. This book has been a staple of proper American writing for a century. It's dry, but the information is good.
2. How to Write With Style by Kurt Vonnegut, 1981. This short article contains eight rules for elegant writing.
3. Purdue Online Writing Lab. This website is targeted at university students, but high school students can learn from it, too. Don't mind the sections on job searching and graduate writing.
4. Excelsior Online Writing Lab. Similar to the above.

Process Writing

Process writing is the idea that writing is a process. You don't just sit down, think hard, and magically produce an amazing piece of work. Rather, you do distinct tasks at distinct times, and these all fit together to help you create something nice. Betty Flowers describes the writer's job as four different roles:

1. **Madman** – creates ideas, ideas, and yet more ideas
2. **Architect** – chooses the best ideas from the madman's ramblings
3. **Carpenter** – rearranges paragraphs and sentences
4. **Judge** – adjusts punctuation, spelling, vocabulary choice

Don't try to do these jobs all at the same time. Many people find it harder to write than to edit, so when you're in a writing groove, stay in the groove and write as much as you can. In other words, when you're creating, be the madman, and save the judge for later.

Also, remind yourself to focus on the medium run. Nobody writes a prize-winning essay the first time they grab a keyboard. It takes time and energy to improve our writing skills. Every time you seriously attempt to communicate something on paper, you get better at it. The important thing is that three months from now you're a better writer than today.

Madman

Architect

Carpenter

Judge

How to Write Faster

Students sometimes ask how they can write faster. There is no short answer, because everything depends on the student's situation and goals, but here are some common considerations.

1. **Are you doing process writing?** The above method is one way of structuring your writing time. The goal of process writing is to increase quality, but it might also increase speed.
2. **What is actually taking a long time?** Students might have trouble thinking of ideas, or perhaps they can't organize their thoughts. It might also happen that they take a long time editing because the grammar is difficult or the formatting is tedious. Before trying to speed up the process, first consider where time is being spent.
3. **Sometimes it takes time.** Even professionals have writers block on occasion. If you can't make progress right now, take a break and try again later. Talking to a friend, family member, or teacher might also help you think of ideas of what to try next.
4. **Are you practicing for the TOEFL, SAT, or some other standardized test?** If you are, usually there are specific rules and predictable writing prompts. Daily writing practice using sample questions or past questions, even if nobody ever reads your answers, will help you build speed and confidence.

5. **Low-stakes writing is effective.** Low-stakes writing (sometimes called **informal writing** or **casual writing**) is writing where you're not being graded, where it doesn't particularly matter how perfectly you write as long as you're trying to express yourself. When you're doing low-stakes writing, many formats are possible. For example, you could use TOEFL test practice prompts, write a journal, do freewriting, or anything else, as long as the outcome is low pressure. Unsurprisingly, when people can relax and write without fear of getting embarrassed or getting a low score, they tend to write faster and with greater confidently. Over time, this improves overall writing quality.

References

- Elbow, P. (1973). Freewriting. Writing Without Teachers. Oxford University Press.
- Flowers, B. (1979). Madman, Architect, Carpenter, Judge: Roles and the Writing Process. Proceedings of the Conference of College Teachers of English of Texas 44: 7-10.

Academic Voice

Academic writing is written in the **academic voice**, which is meant to sound objective, authoritative, and reasonable. While a paper is likely to contain your opinion on a topic, it should present the evidence in a rational manner. If the subject matter isn't personal, as in the case of many academic essays, write in an objective tone. Even if you're passionate about a subject, maintain professionalism.

Academic voice does not need to include fancy or abstract language. Strive to write with energy and clarity, and readers will appreciate your efforts.

Rules of Thumb

1. When in doubt, avoid using "I".
2. When in doubt, avoid using "you". You might be able to write "some people" instead.
3. When in doubt, avoid using "we". Under APA rules, "we" refers to co-authors, but some people also use it to refer to the local community or people in general.
4. Don't use contractions.
5. Use abbreviations when reasonable. If you want to use one, write out the proper term the first time you use it and put the abbreviation in parentheses. Subsequently, write only the abbreviation.
6. When writing about something close to home, such as your own school or town, for example, assume the reader is unfamiliar with the setting, and provide general information.

Exceptions

The above information applies to much academic writing. However, there are situations (e.g., persuasive essays) where you can ignore many of the aforementioned warnings. When in doubt, read the rules for the assignment, look at examples, and talk to the instructor. Finally, use your own judgment.

Examples

Here are some examples (in red) of sentences that don't have proper academic voice. They are followed by suggested alternatives (in green).

1. I think anyone who becomes a parent should have to take a parenting class.
   → Parenting classes should be mandatory for any biological or adoptive parents.
2. When you read "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," you will realize that King was writing to people besides the ministers who criticized him.
   → Upon reading "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," readers will note that King was addressing a wider audience than the clergy who condemned his actions.
3. It shouldn't be difficult to record what we feel, but many of us just can't get our feelings down on paper.
   → It should not be difficult to record feelings, but many people are unable to do so.
4. It's obvious that she's a feminist because she makes a big deal about women who were into the suffrage movement.

→ Because of her focus on the suffrage movement, one can assume she is a feminist.

5. Smith was declared the official winner at the P.O. last Mon. on Jan. 6th.
   → Smith was declared the official winner at the post office last Monday, on January 6.

References

- Academic Voice. (2023). Excelsior Online Writing Lab, Excelsior University. Retrieved 2024. CC BY-SA 4.0. *Some of the above content was copy/pasted from here.*
- Academic Voice. (2023). University of Arizona Global Campus Writing Center. Retrieved 2025.
- Tips on Academic Voice. (2023). Excelsior Online Writing Lab, Excelsior University. Retrieved 2024. CC BY-SA 4.0. *Some of the above content was copy/pasted from here.*

Exciting Titles

The first thing the reader sees is the title. In many situations, if the title is bad, they'll stop reading before they even started. Here are some criteria for choosing a title.

- **Captivating**. Catch the reader's attention.
- **Specific**. Be specific enough that the reader sees the general topic.
- **General**. Don't be so specific that you recreate the thesis statement.
- **Original**. Your paper will be easy to find later.
- **5-15 words**. Long titles annoy the reader.

Bad Titles

Here are some uninspiring titles, along with explanations why they fail. These are fake.

1. A Study to Investigate Apples
   An Analysis of Apples
   An Examination of Apples
   The History of Apples
   Not specific.
2. About Apples
   On Apples
   The first word adds nothing.
3. What I Talk About When I Talk About Apples
   The first eight words contribute nothing.
4. Apples!!
   One exclamation point is questionable. Two is clearly excessive.
5. Examining the Rapid Shift From Apple Cider to Beer as a Result of Extreme Economic Pressure in the Prohibition Era
   Too much information.

Brainstorming a Title

Choosing a title is a creative act with few strict rules. Even if you follow the above suggestions, there's no obvious way to proceed. Here are some methods that many writers use, along with real examples.

1. **Arrange keywords.** Look at your thesis statement and conclusion. Pick out two or three important words, jot them down, and put them together with verbs or adverbs.
2. **Use a colon to add information.**
   Surgeons on the Operating Table: A Report on How Meditation Can Improve Surgery Success
   Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness
   Web Design: The First 100 Years
   Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World
   Tony Hawk: How a Personal Brand Can Build a Business Empire
   For Sale: One Used Internet Company Called Yahoo
3. **Ask a question.** However, be careful with yes-no questions. Betteridge's Law says that the answer to any question in a headline is "*No*", so think twice before asking a

question where that's the answer.
What Mary Didn't Know
Can Twitter Predict the Future? Pentagon Says Maybe

4. **Find a hook.** Hooks come in many forms. See if you can find something surprising, contrasting, or unique. Save shocking headlines for tabloids.
   Reflections on Trusting Trust
   You and Your Research
   How to Be an Antiracist
   The Conscience of a Hacker
   Top U.S. Cities for Bedbug Infestations
   Creative Crafter and Culinary Concocter
5. **Use a play on words.**
   A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace
   Practice Makes Perfect, Theory Makes Up
   One-hit Wonders Aren't All That Wondrous
   A Theft-Based Approach to 3D Object Acquisition
   Come Hell and High Water
   Sorry, Long Number

Capitalization

When capitalizing titles, there are two common conventions: title case and sentence case.

- **Title case** – according to APA guidelines, all major words are capitalized, including the first word, all nouns and verbs, and any word of 4+ letters. The example titles listed on this page are all in title case.
- **Sentence case** – the first word is capitalized, as are all proper nouns.

Some instructors prefer one style, and other instructors accept either one. When in doubt, ask your instructor. If your title is complicated and you're unsure how to capitalize it, use a title converter website.

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Key Sentences

Thesis Statement

An essay's **thesis statement** (**thesis**, for short) is the central idea, the focal point the paper. It is typically the last sentence of the opening paragraph, though it can also be effectively placed elsewhere. The rest of the essay expands and supports the thesis.

For example, if you are writing about life on other planets, your thesis might be one of these:

- Recent research into the topography of Mars increases the odds that Earth is not the only planet in our solar system that harbors life.
- While the search for extraterrestrial intelligence is an important function of the SETI Institute, the Institute also provides resources for students in all aspects of astronomy.
- Among hundreds of movies about extraterrestrial intelligence, Close Encounters of the Third Kind is the most thought-provoking.
- The Drake Equation provides no proof of intelligent life, but it strongly suggests it.
- No official government investigation or serious scientific study has confirmed the existence of UFOs.

A good essay develops the thesis in a series of paragraphs so that readers feel satisfied that the writer has established the validity of the thesis. Your thesis might evolve as you compose your essay. At least once during the revision process, see how well the body paragraphs support the thesis. If necessary, change your thesis or add more to the body.

In an academic paper, your thesis should be clear and specific. If it's unclear, the audience will be annoyed that they have to work hard to decipher the message when it was your job to do so, and if it's too general, the audience will immediately think of counterexamples and dismiss your conclusion.

Topic Sentences

The topic sentence is typically the first or second sentence of each paragraph. Similar to the thesis statement, the topic sentence should give the reader a preview of what's going to happen in the paragraph. Topic sentences are necessary for most paragraphs. Sometimes there are stylistic reasons to omit or move topic sentences, but take care when doing so, because it can mislead the reader.

Here are some common problems with topic sentences.

1. **Lacks substance.** Suppose you open with, Studying foreign languages is useful. That might be accurate, but the reader is left wondering why and for whom it is important. Add either of those pieces to the sentence and the reader will be happy.
2. **Misuses pronouns.** If you write "it" or "they" in a topic sentence, and that's referring to something in the previous paragraph, the reader might not follow the reference.
3. **Introduces evidence.** If you cite a source in the topic sentence, you're sending a message that the entire paragraph is about that one source. If that's what you intend

to do, then go for it. But if you want to start with one source and then transition to another, start with a broad topic.

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Evaluating Sources

As you do research for a paper, you'll need to know how to assess the validity and reliability of the materials you find. The sources you find have all been put out there by groups, organizations, corporations, or individuals who have some motivation for getting this information to you. To be a good researcher, you need to learn how to assess the materials you find and determine their reliability—before deciding if you want to use them and, if so, how you want to use them. Whether you are examining material in books, journals, magazines, newspapers, or websites, you want to consider several issues before deciding if and how to use the material you have found.

Suitability

Does the source fit your needs and purpose? Before you start amassing large amounts of research materials, think about the types of materials you will need to meet the specific requirements of your project.

- **General Materials** – Encyclopedias, magazines, and online news sites are good places to get an overview of your topic and the big questions associated with it. These are a useful starting point, and they can help you present the issue in a way that attracts the average reader's attention.
- **Professional Materials** – For high school research papers, look for books, journal articles, and websites that are written by organizations that do in-depth work for the general public on issues related to your topic. Professional materials are written by people who specialize in that particular field, so they can provide more depth and accuracy than a journalist might.
- **Specialist Materials** – Primary and secondary research data is published in academic journals, and it's typically written by professional researchers for other professional academics. High school students are not the target audience. If you have a strong background in your topic area, or if you're doing a major research paper, you could venture into specialists' books, journals, and websites. However, keep an eye on the time. If you've looked at a paper for fifteen minutes and have no idea what it's about, try a different resource.

Warning Signs

Here are some questions to help you detect unreliable material. If your source shows a warning sign, it may still be usable, but examine it carefully before continuing. When in doubt, confirm the information with another source.

1. **Who is the author?** Many websites won't list an author. If they don't, look at the website itself to see what organization owns it, and what their mission statement is. Can you find contact information or an address? Websites that don't provide background information are unreliable.
2. **Is the author an expert in that field?** If a biologist is writing about polar bears, that's a normal thing. If an economist is writing about education policy, they might not know very much. If the writer is associated with a specific conservative or liberal think tank, the arguments they present probably reflect that organization's ideology. An ideological agenda does not mean that you have to avoid material. Rather, read it with an awareness that the writer holds a specific view.

3. **How many references are there?** If the author doesn't cite any sources, how can you confirm what they're saying? If they cite only one source, take a look at that source and examine its suitability.
4. **Is it outdated?** If you're writing about a contemporary issue, relying on a source from ten years ago might be unwise. If it's something historical, perhaps there's no cause for concern. Be wary of web pages that don't show when they were written or updated.
5. **Is the topic volatile?** A famous proverb goes, "The first casualty of war is truth." War, religion, and politics are divisive topics. If you're writing on these topics, plan to spend extra time on research. Look out for lies, poorly explained statistics, and dogmatism (expressing one's opinion as fact).

Things to Do

If you're looking at a source and some of the above warning signs show up, what should you do? There is no single correct answer; it depends on the situation, your goals, and what other sources you can find. Here are some possible actions.

1. **Research the author or organization.** See if the author or organization has some background that suggests they're reliable on the issue. If someone has an advanced degree or a decade of experience in the field, that's a good sign. On the other hand, some think tanks have specific political agendas, which can bias the information they produce, even if they have experts on staff.
2. **Look for a second source.** If you can find two sources that make the same claim, cite both of them together. This doesn't guarantee the information is true, but it's a step in the right direction. For long research papers, it's usually a requirement to cite multiple sources, so you were going to do this anyway.
3. **Ask someone knowledgeable.** Perhaps you have a friend, family member, or teacher who knows something about either the source or the topic itself. Maybe they can help you figure out whether a source or claim is likely to be reasonable. Then you can decide which, if any, of the above steps to take.
4. **Mention your suspicion.** Depending on the paper you're writing, perhaps you can quote a source but mention questions of reliability. Be clear about who is claiming what, and that it hasn't been verified.
5. **Keep an eye on the time.** As a high school student, you have a busy life with many things to do. Try to find reliable sources within a reasonable amount of time, and then start writing.
6. **Throw it away.** Sometimes you have to forget about a source and move on. Propaganda, fake news, and hoaxes have always been an issue, and in recent years generative AI has produced countless new unreliable websites.

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Academic Integrity

Each institution and instructor has their own set of policies on academic integrity. Pay attention to the rules for each course, because they might differ. Nevertheless, the two main notions are to do your own work and be honest about what your work is based on. Here is a fairly ordinary policy on AI:

AI

1. In response to recent developments in AI (artificial intelligence) technology, students should be aware that any submitted written work that has been compiled (partially or entirely) with the assistance of AI cannot be regarded as the student's own work.
2. Any AI-generated text needs to be credited in the body of the text and appropriately referenced in the bibliography.
3. An essay constructed of predominantly quotes is not likely to be graded as highly as would work that shows original thinking and skillful application of knowledge.

ChatGPT

Google Translate

DeepL

Plagiarism

According to Harvard University, "In academic writing, it is considered plagiarism to draw any idea or any language from someone else without adequately crediting that source in your paper."

Plagiarism has various negative consequences. At school or university, it could lead to failing grades or suspension. If done repeatedly, it could possibly lead to expulsion. In the workplace, plagiarism occasionally gets people fired, and some cases have led to lawsuits. From an educational standpoint, students are going to school to learn, and learning requires practice, so even if you could plagiarize and never get caught, you would be wasting your time.

Can you use sites such as ChatGPT, Google Translate, DeepL or other similar online resources? Yes, maybe, if you are careful. How can you use online and offline references and resources? Cite the source. Cite the source if you:

- use AI or translation sites
- quote, paraphrase, or summarize
- use an idea you learned through research
- are supporting a key point
- are supporting a surprising point

Citations are mainly used in three situations: quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.

Quoting

A **dropped quote** is where an entire sentence is quoted.

"The problem is, no one really knows the long-term effects of such complex genetic manipulation—and the potential dangers to humans and the environment are substantial" (Turner, 2021).

"When the going gets weird, the weird turn professional" (Thompson, 1973).

An **integrated quote** uses part of an external sentence along with the writer's own words.

Turner (2021) claims that the primary issue is that "no one really knows the long-term effects of such complex genetic manipulation," and this lack of understanding could cause significant damage to both humanity and the environment.

Thompson (1994) describes Richard Nixon as a president who "was utterly without ethics or morals or any bedrock sense of decency."

A **block quote** is where a lengthy piece of text is quoted and indented. Because of the clear indentation, quotation marks are not used.

> When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away. (Fitzgerald, 1925)

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is putting external information into your own words. Here are some good examples.

1. Original: "Workplace health and safety is the legal responsibility of all employers" (Cullen, French & Jakeman, 2014).
   Paraphrase: Each company has the obligation to keep its employees healthy and safe (Cullen, French & Jakeman, 2014).
2. Original: "Providing proper healthcare facilities and treatment is expensive, and the rising cost of healthcare puts a lot of pressure on the working population" (Dummett, Stephenson & Lansford, 2017).
   Paraphrase: According to Dummett, Stephenson & Lansford (2017), the price of healthcare is increasing, and this is leading to problems for ordinary people.
3. Original: "The world must ensure that new technologies, especially those based on AI, are used for the good of our societies and their sustainable development. It should regulate AI developments and applications so that they conform to the fundamental rights that frame our democratic horizon" (Azoulay, 2018).
   Paraphrase: New AI developments should be regulated so that their use adheres to fundamental human rights and any impact on communities globally is beneficial and sustainable (Azoulay, 2018).

Bad Paraphrasing

To paraphrase properly, you have to transform the quote. You can use some of the same vocabulary, but be certain to alter the sentence structure. After all, if the original work was already perfect, you could have quoted it instead. Let's look at some examples of bad paraphrasing.

1. Original: "Speakers of English on opposite sides of the Atlantic often use different words to refer to the same thing" (Ferraro, 2001).
   Paraphrase: According to Ferraro (2001), speakers of English on opposite sides of the Atlantic often use different words to refer to the same thing.
   Problem: The same words are used. This should be a quote.
2. Original: "Native English speakers now would have great difficulty understanding Old English" (History of the English Language, 2013).
   Paraphrase: As explained in History of the English Language (2013), Native English speakers today would have great challenges understanding Old English.
   Problem: The sentence structure is the same. Most of the words are identical.
3. Original: "You can't be in London for long without going to the Zoo" (Milne, 1925).
   Paraphrase: It has been said that you can't be in London for a very long time without going to the zoo (Milne, 1925).
   Problem: The original sentence structure is still being used.
4. Original: "Whenever a fly came and settled on his nose he had to blow it off. And I think—but I am not sure—that that is why he was always called Pooh" (Milne, 1925).
   Paraphrase: As Milne (1925) explained, whenever a fly came and landed on Winnie's nose he had to blow it off. That is why he was called Pooh.
   Problem: Parts of the original were cut, but the structure and vocabulary is still there.

Summarizing

Summarizing is similar to paraphrasing, except that summaries are always shorter than the original text. As with paraphrasing, include the author and publication year.

For example, consider this original text:

Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he remember well his ignorance—which his growth requires—who has so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly. (Thoreau, 1854)

One could summarize it as follows:

In *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, the author suggests that the human fixation on work desensitizes man to the world around him, to the needs of his own intellectual growth, and to the complexity and frailty of his fellow humans (Thoreau, 1854).

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